THE VISUALIZATION OF PROTESTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE:

THE RHIZOMATIC ACTIVISM IN THAILAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Networked communication technology has intensified protests around the world. Recent contestations of power and resistance since the 2011 Occupy Wall Street have unfolded with the visuals of loosely organized gatherings. These visuals displaced a hunger strike or mass rallies with speeches and blurred the lines between online and on the street. It has been debated whether Internet and social media platforms foster or curtail democracy. Departing from cyber utopian views and the logocentric Habermasian public sphere, *The Visualization of Protests in Digital Age: The Rhizomatic Activism in Thailand* addresses how self-organized activism in Thailand reconfigures the spectacles of people's resistance in the digital age. Based on Deleuze, Guattari and Latour's concepts of network, Thai people innovated different networks of resistance—assemblages of people, cultural practices, symbols from popular culture, visuals, and alliances.

This project focuses on the visuals of protests, introduced and disseminated on social media platforms. These visuals succinctly exert force in political contestation, advocacy and participation. Chapter 1 discusses Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes that can be used to rethink social movements with networked communication technology. The chapter also features the research questions, theoretical framework of social movements, visual communication and the Internet as the fertile grounds of contestation, background of Thai political turbulence and chapter overview. Chapter 2

examines the public performances of the violence of the 2010 crackdown and how protesters created lines of flight, forging networks of resistance. Chapter 3 illustrates how people engaged in politics by means of visuals such as memes to co-create meanings of events, advocate for political actions, contest truths and participate in cultural production. Chapter 4 analyzes the transformation of protests under severe military suppression. People adopted symbolic acts and appropriation of gestures from popular culture to amplify their acts defying the coup makers. Chapter 5 concludes with the discussion on media technology and the posthumanist ontology in examining the visuals of resistance, challenges and limitations in the digital technology. The findings of this dissertation show that activism in the digital age is rhizomatic, adaptive to suppression and unfolding in ever-changing transformations.

To freedom fighters.

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CHAPTER 1

VISUALIZATION OF PROTESTS: DECENTERED ACTIVISM IN THE NETWORKED SPHERE

"There can be no revolutionary actions, Anti-Oedipus concludes, where the relations between people and groups are relations of exclusion and segregation. Groups must multiply and connect in ever new ways, freeing up territorialities for the construction of new social arrangements"
Mark Seem, Introduction, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* 1977 p.xxiv

"Power doesn't hide or mask itself; it reveals itself as tyranny pursued into the tiniest details; it is cynical and at the same time pure and entirely "justified," because its practice can be totally formulated within the framework of morality. Its brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination of Good over Evil, of order over disorder."
Foucault, "*Intellectuals and power*," 1977b, p. 210

On May 22, 2014 in Thailand, Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha staged a coup d'état after months of political turmoil that had started in late 2013. The evening after, Thai people came out to protest against the coup makers. The military arrested protesters and summoned people to report to the authorities. Individuals posted on their social media networks to organize gatherings at the Victory Monument at 5:00 p.m. every day. People showed up with banners, paper signs, and placards to protest against the coup. College students volunteered to write signs in Thai and English for those who did not bring posters or banners. They took "selfies" or stood to be photographed by reporters. On the elevated walkway to the skytrain, people stood overlooking the gathering at the monument.

A week after the coup d'état, on May 29, 2014, I was at Thammasat University, where students would announce their statement against the coup. Police in plainclothes were also there to observe the event, mingling with the group of students and protesters. After the statement, people planned to join the gathering at the Victory Monument. However, reporters stationed at the venue told me that vendors in the area were instructed to go home. The police had sealed off the area with prisoner trucks parked at the monument. I tweeted, "Vendors at Victory Monument were ordered to leave the venue by 3:00 p.m. Actions to deal with the anti-coup protesters were planned." People interacted with my tweet and confirmed the presence of police. Individuals on Facebook called off the gathering, and word traveled quickly. At 5:00 p.m., no protesters showed up except for two women. The visuals of this evening depicted thousands of police officers with prisoner trucks on empty streets. The absence of bodies on the streets changed the cartography of activism. The unruly citizens refused to succumb to the authorities' use of force. They were able to immediately respond to the situation due to networked communication. And when gathering on the streets was no longer an option, people persuaded others on social media to flash the three-fingered salute in public places or anywhere. This self-initiated activism took off in myriad forms.

The explosion of social media in the past decade has intensified protests around the world, from Bangkok to Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street, Ferguson, Iceland, England and elsewhere. Crowds fight against despotism, oppressive governments, structural inequality, and social injustice. Protests are now events to be witnessed by all of society. Seas of people on the streets would not be as powerful without photos. These images transmit visceral experiences of the events. They make visible new truths,

knowledge, and alternative views of the world.

Mainstream media might not always work in the people's best interests. News organizations are heavily mediated by the authorities, organization policy, and corporate business models. The media in Thailand are subject to state control. When the military stages a coup d'état, television and radio stations have to stop their broadcasts when armed soldiers take control of the stations. Through the Emergency Decree and Martial Law, Thai media organizations are required to present news stories that conform to national security. Based on my experience as a television news producer at the state-owned stations of Channel 11 and Channel 9, organizational and self-censorship were readily in place. One outstanding example was news coverage of the protests. These news organizations had a policy to limit visuals that might deepen the conflicts. In the wake of the 2008 political turmoil, many incidents of violence at protests were not featured. Self-censorship also filtered and omitted truths of the 2010 violent crackdown on the Red Shirt protesters. Thai news organizations stayed on the safe side. Oftentimes, that is not the side where the people stand.

In democratic countries such as the United States, the media are still subject to criticism for failing to promote equality, democracy, or social change. Schudson (2011) explains in *The Society of News* that news is constructed and heavily mediated. It is not uncommon to find the news conforming to the ideology of the ruling class, the government, or corporations. In *Rich Media, Poor Democracy,* McChesney (1999) pointed out that the media have become significantly "anti-democratic." He, along with Innis (1951), argues that commercialization and monopoly in media ownership can hinder democracy (McChesney, 2013). A small number of major U.S. corporations,

including the top six — Comcast, Walt Disney, Twenty-First Century Fox, Time Warner, Time Warner Cable, and DirecTV — driven by competition in the capitalist market, can exert tremendous control over the media (Le, 2015). In 1985, 50 companies controlled 90% of American media. Now, only six conglomerates essentially control the market (Lutz, 2012). With the existing business models of news and media industry, mass media is a difficult space for democratic participation and debate about social issues to thrive.

Previous grassroots communication models and organizations, such as the Independent Media Center or the IndyMedia, were formed to counter corporate-owned media, starting with the coverage of the 1999 World Trade organization (WTO) protests. This model of journalism democratized people's participation and contribution in reporting on social justice. Furthermore, the Zapatistas movement and other subcultures turned to mobile technology and networked communication, such as the Internet, to disseminate information that exists outside the realm of traditional media outlets (Russell, 2005). With social media, we start to witness an acceleration in communication that allows individuals to engage in protests on the streets and online. They *are* the media, bypassing the mainstream media channels. In the Arab Spring, for example, the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia were tweeted and amplified across the world (Lotan et al. 2011). In the United States, the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement marked a turn in how individuals' online conversation galvanized mainstream media coverage. This was evident during the first week of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests when individuals used social media to communicate about the gatherings at Zuccotti Park, which the mainstream media hardly covered (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). Occupy Wall Street advocates called this the Media Blackout (Grant & Sanders, 2011). However,

conversations about the movement in the Twittersphere were remarkable. Eric Gibbs, a volunteer at the social network, told Wired.com, "We get 20 tweets every 10-15 seconds, so it's hard to keep up. You aren't even finished reading the 20 and you get 20 more and it just keeps going. This is how it's been for 18 days" (Carter, 2011). Such lively engagement eventually led to coverage of Occupy Wall Street on mainstream media.

Similarly, in Thailand, Thai people witnessed cases of individuals generating acts of dissent that were initially circulated on social media platforms before being covered by major news outlets. After the 2010 violent crackdown on the Red Shirt protesters, contestations unfolded in a decentralized manner. Individuals went out to generate visuals to contest official narratives about the crackdown. Networked communication was adopted in coordinating their gatherings and disseminating the visuals of their participation. This happened due to the rigid control of the state. The Thai media were under martial law. Protest leaders were arrested and detained. Citizens were prohibited from attending public gatherings of more than five people. Resistance sprung from these limitations in creative forms. The visuals of these acts of defiance were visible along the lines of the networked communication platforms, and were subsequently featured in the mainstream media. Recent cases of decentralized protests and political expressions were more evident in the 2013 Anti-Amnesty Bill and the 2014 Anti-Coup. Decentered individuals initiated their acts of resistance in do-it-yourself varieties. Smartphones, equipped with cameras and connected to social media applications, amplified the cascades of visuals they generated while engaging in acts of resistance, territorializing the cyber frontier.

Rethinking Social Movements in the Digital Age:

Rhizomatic Acts of Resistance

The changing ecology of technology remaps the ways people visualize and materialize their political lives. The modes of engagement in practice of citizenship have changed. The visibility of resistance on social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter transforms activism. This dissertation forwards the rethinking of social movements and activism in the digital age. Drawing from the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), this dissertation illustrates that humans are modes interacting with things in the world. Their concept of assemblages de-emphasizes the "human" in hierarchical models to look beyond the human. Their ontology examines human interdependence with other things in the world, such as plants, seas, machines, objects, music, and winds, among others. The world is made up of connections, incessantly being made and unmade, and movements that are constantly speeding up and slowing down. For Latour, there are networks of alliances gaining "strength only by associating with others" (Latour, 1988, p. 160). These networks can be self-forming and self-organizing. This is evident in communication networks such as the social platforms that facilitate the kind of environment in which people are connected from one personal account to another. They can make new connections by "friending," "liking," "following," and "joining" groups or fan pages on Facebook. These small acts can create immense networks at great speeds.

Deleuze, Guattari, and Latour's concepts are valuable in suggesting how we can rethink the activism and networked communication technologies. We affect and are affected by multiple living and nonliving things (Deleuze, 1988). Rather than singling out a pure form of artifacts, styles, or rhetoric, inclusive approaches are considered. With

multiplicities, flows, connections, and arrangements, a regime of visual images of activism exert force in hyperocular networked communication.

In addition, Deleuze and Guattari posit the concept of rhizomes—a term in biology that refers to a form of plant that is subterranean, such as bulbs and tubers. Rhizomes can be diverse forms, "from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Rhizomes expand horizontally, contrary to the arborescent or hierarchical structure. There is no beginning or ending; it's "anti-genealogy" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 11). A rhizome may be severed, but it can start up again on its old or new lines. It incessantly takes up new forms and configurations at new contacts. New connections can be formed at nodal points. The process does not lead to homogeneity; rather, it leads to endless transformation. This concept is useful for rethinking acts of activism when encountering suppression. Rhizomatic protests play out in ever-changing transformations. The people's movement in activism can be like Deleuzian rhizomes that are always in motion, with fluid actors that constantly build alliances and construct networks that accumulate force.

This dissertation examines multiple acts of defiance and visualizations of political protests with Thailand as a case study. The country has experienced political turbulence over the past decade with countless protests, fatal crackdowns on protesters, and two coup d'états. With media censorship, martial law, and the military regime, Thai political resistance has dramatically transformed from hierarchically organized mass rallies into horizontally decentralized groups with no speeches or orators. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire, assemblages and rhizomes, I argue that protests in Thailand unfolded in rhizomatic forms with assemblages of bodies, forms, and

expressions that are adaptive to the institution of power's suppression. The politics during Thailand's political transition includes the networks of resistance. These rhizomatic engagements in political advocacy have transformed into multiplicities of resistance, such as web board discussions, web blogs, radio talk shows, radio parodies, digital fiction, songs, plays, memes, Facebook Fan pages and groups, citizen journalists, kitsch, T-shirts, protests on the streets, memorialization, and individuals who regularly contributed their opinions on their personal networks.

This dissertation specifically focuses on the visuals of resistance. I investigate how people practice citizenship and how they contest the established power by means of visual rhetoric. This kind of power differs from previously established power derived from existing resources, such as power through the rule of law or privileged positions. People can advocate simply by appearing in public. Thai citizens created their own space and initiated their own events and spectacles to advocate for their politics, using practices of everyday life, popular culture, and communication technologies to advance their advocacy and alliances. This marks a departure from the scholarship in social movements that emphasized peaceful means, rhetorical persuasion of eloquent speeches, and the charisma of leaders at mass rallies.

This dissertation engages the debate on technology and its amplification in communicating social protests and activism. The discussion of technology is not limited to new media as the digital realm that promotes democracy. Rather, this project closely examines the force of visuals and how it remaps social mobilization in the networked sphere. In the distracted age, personal expressions in visual forms succinctly exert force in social actions. The dissertation is guided by the following questions:

1. How do assemblages of public performance disrupt the official narrative of state violence against civilians?
2. How do political expressions transform into new modes of political engagements that exceed rational and idealized forms of speech in the networked sphere?
3. How do visuals, introduced by decentralized individuals, foster new forms of organization, advocacy, and alliance?

Method

To answer these questions, I examine the rhetorical force of visual communication generated by decentered individuals. Due to Deleuze, Guattari and Latour's philosophical principles, they are suspicious of formalized methodologies. Instead, these scholars argue for creativity, innovation, fluidity, experiment and force (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Latour, 1988). Texts, in the postmodernist and posthumanist views, are not limited to closed or fixed texts or those reduced to certain images. Texts in the digital age and those circulated on social platforms are especially fragmented. Latour (2005) promotes looking at how these fragments or pieces of things are linked together. Latour does not posit a method on how to select texts or objects working in connection. However, in this dissertation, following the principles of these philosophers, I examine the force of visuals of resistance and what they do to contest or advocate for political causes. These visuals are not limited to specific iconic images that are made popular by mainstream media, but those creatively innovated by individuals and visuals that are intensified by social media platforms. The dissertation features three case studies of creative and self-initiated practices of resistance in the politics of Thailand: the visuals of

bodies engaged in performative acts at the crime scene; memes in political participation; and the appropriation of the *Hunger Games'* three-fingered salute in anti-coup activism. The selection of texts was based on Thai people's engagement, participation and interaction with mainstream media. Similar to a journalistic claim of objectivity, objectivity in research is an unattainable ideal. Therefore, I acknowledge that the selection of texts is subjective and not free from biases as I trace the rhetorical force produced from fragments of texts. In the first case study, public performances that decentered individuals generated assemblages that people actively participated in and were later featured by news media. The texts were public performances, vigils, and memorializations that took place after the May 19, 2010 crackdown on the Red Shirts and 2 years after. The visuals of the performances shown in this dissertation were taken by the author unless indicated otherwise. The second case study examines the force of memes that motivated political advocacy, co-creation of political meanings, pursuit of truths and participation in digital culture. The memes discussed in this case were selected based on people's participation and aggregation on social media platforms during the surge of political tension from November 2013 to April 2014. The third case explores the force of visuals of people's resistance after the May 22, 2014 coup d'état. The texts or the visuals of resistance were generated and proliferated on social media platforms from the day after the coup d'état to the end of December 2014.

The following sections discuss theoretical concepts about social movements, visual media, and changing media technology that promote new possibilities to practice citizenship. The latter part of this section provides background on Thai politics and the outline of the chapters of the dissertation with the scope of the case studies of visual

politics in social activism.

Theoretical Framework

Social Movements

Research on social movements focuses on analyses of organization, history, sociology, or shared identities. Social movements are inevitably rhetorical since "they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal" (Morris & Browne, 2001, p. 1). These include an array of symbolic activities, such as public addresses, performances, rallies, posters, songs, or kitsch—"all the means of persuasion imaginable and necessary for organized protests" (Morris & Browne, 2001, p. 4).

In addition, Griffin (1952) examines rhetoric in social movements by suggesting the inclusion of an historical approach to evaluate conflicts. He posits that one should not focus solely on a particular orator but to also consider other rhetorical artifacts and multiple speakers to identify rhetorical patterns intrinsic to the movement. Haiman (1967) broadens the study of social movement by espousing the "rhetoric of the streets." He argues that with the mushrooming student protests against the Vietnam War at the time, bodies can be rhetorical. The study of rhetoric should not be grounded only in speech. Scott and Smith (1969) further argue for the "rhetoric of confrontation." They believe that such a process may lead to revolutionary change. This approach examines the existing power dynamic and the social relations that entails.

Coming from a sociological perspective, Simons (1970) maps out problems and

requirements in the rhetorical approach. He points out that leaders of the movement might have to conform to their own movement's demands. Dr. King was one leader who embraced both radical and moderate approaches to mobilizing social resistance. In Simons' concept, social movement centers on structures and organizations. The resources are mobilized for maximum capacity and efficiency. Rhetoric is employed to meet the needs of the groups and work within the framework of an organization.

Meanwhile, McGee (1980) argues that social movement should not be theoretically assumed as "a thing in itself," but as a "set of meanings" or a mode of consciousness. He, along with Cathcart, argues that the kernel of rhetoric in social movements lies in the changes in collective consciousness or changes in the symbolic interpretation of the environment. McGee's view influenced scholars to shift their focus from leader-centered studies to marginalized populations and their resistance. New Social Movement (NSM) studies arose from social theorists who examined identity-based movements, paying attention to theorizing "counterpublics" as an approach to resistance. This term emerged as a response to the Habermasian view of the 18th-century public sphere that privileged a rational mode of argument in negotiation with the state. The model bracketed people who did not share bourgeois characteristics. NSM theory counters the rationality/resource-based theory of social mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and examines culture, especially discourses of opposition groups' activities and interests. NSM is not aimed at achieving a uniformity of goals or interests, but the ability to function outside of the dominant public as a "critical oppositional force" (Palczewski, 2001, p. 165). NSM scholars, such as Felski (1989), argue that the discursive attribute of counterpublics responds to Habermasian assumptions about universal interests by

projecting an assertion of differences in race, gender, and sexual orientation. Meanwhile, Fraser (1992) posits the term "subaltern counterpublics" as an approach to create and disseminate alternative views of identities, preferences, and interests of marginalized groups. Such an approach centers on the rhetorical aspect of the movement, which is the conceptual shift that McGee originally advocated for.

Social movement scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s constitutes poststructuralist views, embracing analyses on polysemic and pliable texts at a time when emphasis on speech dissipated (Cox & Foust, 2009). Rhetoricians pointed out the flaw in modernist views predicated on rationality that limit how we perceive the world. The field intersects with performance studies that posits human bodies as a critical site of resistance. Conquergood (2002) argues that the body can function as a communicative actor. He illustrates this with his ethnographic work on gangs in New York whose "dances" demarcate their territory. This is based on the assumption that the body is a site marked by discourses, depicting gender, sexuality, race and identity (Butler, 1993, 2011). Scholars in this field examine how the body can resist hegemonic discourses. Patrick Anderson (2010), for instance, examines a hunger strike as a political argument in *So Much Wasted*. People opted for self-starvation as a rhetorical act of resistance in prisons, art galleries or medical facilities. This form of resistance is posited as performance with material and embodied acts that can be understood through its own logic and grammar (Cox & Foust, 2009). Performance illuminates acts of resistance that exist beyond linguistic confines. Bodies "exceed the protocols of deliberative reasoning" (DeLuca, 1999b, p.12). They can shock people into alternate ways of thinking.

To communicate the visual of the body of resistance, it is necessary to investigate

the ocular world. The following section discusses visual politics in social movements, and the visibility of bodies of resistance, tracing ocular culture and power and how visuals mobilize people for actions.

Visual Politics in Social Movements

In the past, social spectacles were seen in the form of public rituals ranging from religion to state functions. The church's morality plays, architecture and the monarchy's public ceremonies visually communicated the power and ideology of the state. The spectacle of public executions and corporal exhibition to the public were displays of authority (Foucault, 1977a). Before technology, such displays of authority were witnessed in real time. Then, these events continued to exist in people's memories and oral or written stories, but they eventually ceased to exist visually (Solnit, 2003).

Gronbeck argues, "visuality always has been integral to rhetorical consciousness" (Gronbeck, 2008, p. xxiv). Throughout history, visual communication has been carefully thought out and crafted to persuade the public for collective actions. It is aimed at communicating rhetorical actions when people employ symbols, actions, or public performance to persuade or motivate others (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008).

In the United States, the Civil Rights Movement employed nonviolent protests, such as sit-ins at different locations, to call for the end of racial segregation. Planned gatherings of bodies on the streets rendered powerful messages of resistance. Bodies in locations became one of the pivotal tactics of mobilization. However, gatherings of the sheer number of bodies would not be as powerful without photographs or news coverage. Martin Luther King Jr.'s success in raising the conscience of White moderates was not

only because of his public addresses but also his ability to communicate images that made visible the brutality on race (Johnson, 2007). He stressed the importance of the visual when he insisted that photo-journalists do their job to take pictures of the atrocities that took place before their eyes. King insisted, "Unless you record the injustice, the world won't know that the child got beaten...I'm not cold-blooded about it, but it is so much more important for you to take a picture of us getting beaten up than for you to be another person joining in the fray" (Messari, 1997, p. 141).

Scholarship in social movement rhetoric extends beyond the interpretative approaches that analyze human body performances at a specific location. The focus shifts from the body to the mediated communication technology. Visual rhetoric scholars examine the mediation of bodies in photographs, television, and images circulated on the Internet (Cox & Foust, 2009). This does not mean scholars ignore the significance of the body on-site. In fact, the focus is on the visual mediation of bodies. Kevin DeLuca posits image events, which function not by putting the issue to immediate success in problem-solving but by "reducing a complex set of issues to symbols that break people's comfortable equilibrium" (DeLuca, 1999a, p. 3). These image events carry rhetorical force in communicating beyond logocentric traditions.

Similar to the body in resistance, the visual of the body communicates beyond language. For example, the corpse of Emmet Till, the 14-year-old African American who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, displays the stark brutality of racial violence in a way that is difficult for language to equal. It sent "electrifying" effects through Americans in the 1950s, and the force of the image intensified African American demands for justice (Harold & DeLuca, 2005). The iconic photograph was powerful at awakening people to

their moral consciousness. For another example, the horror and pain in the image of the naked Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc, in the "Napalm Girl" photo prompts moral questions and urges public judgement of the Vietnam War (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003).

In addition to the visuals of violated bodies, evident examples of bodies that generate image events can be seen in radical environmental activism. These are events that not only call attention to issues but also shift the meanings of what has been practiced. For example, the discourse of economic dominance that justifies the use of nature as an endless source of supplies is challenged by Greenpeace and Earth First!. The image of the gigantic whaling ship with sophisticated equipment makes nature and these creatures appear vulnerable. DeLuca (1999a) explains that image events are tactics that work not so much in "identification as through disidentification, through the shock or laughter that shatters" (DeLuca, 1999a, p. 52). The image events of bodies in locations, blocking the submarine and roads, chaining themselves or living in trees, do not attempt to propose changes in law, voting, or distribution of power or resources. Instead, DeLuca argues that these are practices that challenge social norms and "deconstruct the established naming of the world" (DeLuca, 1999a, p. 59).

This practice of social movements, privileging the visual and bodies at sites, moves criticism beyond the conceptual confinement of rhetoric that values rationality and speeches. The force of visuals in social movements enables us to see people advocate for their causes with passion to the point that might be "irrational." Beyond the scope of what is allowed by the rule of law or democracy, people put their bodies on the line, creating their own space, and generating images of contestation. It directs us to think and rethink what has been practiced in society.

In the following section, I examine decentered citizens who initiated their own acts of resistance in rhizomatic forms, turning themselves into broadcasters of their agendas to onlookers. The visuals they generated opened up opportunities to muster faithful allies.

The Viral Visual Thrives Like Rhizomes

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) posit their ontological view of the world as an assemblage of heterogeneous elements. They introduce the concept of rhizomes that engender and expand horizontally. Instead of being arboreal and hierarchical structures, things travel and grow horizontally, moving from point to point. The structure of social activism is an assemblage of diverse elements that can expand in horizontal manners. Individuals can organize protests that generate visuals instead of speeches or demands. The visuals of these gatherings generate knowledge and persuasive force to society in nonverbal forms.

This is a departure from the Habermasian public sphere—a model that predicates rationality and ideal speech that renders consensus. Kendall R. Phillips (1996) cautions that such a model is flawed as it can exclude dissent and difference or ignore marginalized populations. In an age when we are surrounded by multiple screens ranging from advertising billboards to portable devices, DeLuca, Sun, and Peeples (2011) suggest a move beyond the public sphere—public screens, which provide avenues for social activism and political participation. They argue, "Public screens highlight dissemination, images, hypermediacy, spectacular publicity, cacophony, immersion, distraction, and dissent" (DeLuca, Sun, & Peeples, 2011, p. 144). Through these means, activists can

perform critiques via spectacle, not critiques versus spectacle (DeLuca, Sun, & Peeples, 2011). People stage image events as a way to critique what they are concerned about.

The visuals of social movements mobilized on site and online in the networked environment are crucial mediators in truth production, social and political engagement, and mobilization. In the case of activism in Thailand, visuals were vibrantly innovated and advocated for. Decentered individuals generated their political critique visually with their bodies at the site as well as those in mediated representative forms on digital networks. These visuals, carrying affects, emotions, and shared identities, can exert their force at each mediating point in networked communications.

Latour posits that the force of the network includes everything — both living and nonliving actants. These include individual citizens, Red Shirts, certain locations, social media platforms, code, IT companies, movies, and selfies. Everything can be the network of alliances that function and interact within systems (Latour, 1988). As part of the alliance, Facebook's code enables and constrains the network as does legal code and cultural practices. The strength of the network depends on the associations and ties it is connected to. The more connections it has, the higher the force. Therefore, the ability to build ties and fortify force is crucial in mobilization in a nonhierarchical management.

The Internet: Fertile Ground for Contestation

The digital network provides new terrain for people to introduce issues that are relevant to their lives. Its networked structure with people connected together via social media platforms amplifies and accelerates people's advocacy and resistance. This kind of communication technology facilitates contestation and mobilization, fostering new kinds

of activism that travel from point to point, gaining force as more people engage and participate in it.

The Internet is a terrain of increasing politicization — a place of struggle for control. Chadwich (2006) argues that governments try to monitor and control the Internet, influencing groups or movements deemed threatening or antagonistic to governments or major corporations. This is apparent in the U.S. National Security Agency's mass surveillance programs exposed by Edward Snowden (Greenwald, 2013). Despite these, activists are creative in finding ways to break stories to the public. The Internet is used as fertile grounds for contestation on all fronts, ranging from states' operations to environmental awareness.

One of the defining characteristics of online activism is networked mobilization, loosely organized, with neither clear leaders nor key speeches. It is easy to mobilize for political and social causes online. Expressions can be seen in the simplest form of clicking "like" or "share." New media critics Malcolm Gladwell (2010) and Evgeny Morozov (2011) call this slacktivism or clicktivism, the kind of participation that takes little effort and does not render any substantial change. However, Morozov states in *Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* that to click "like" as a mark of membership of an organized group for social change and to join a rally on the streets are mutually exclusive. He argues that it is easy to mobilize people to join a low-risk Facebook group. For example, psychologist Anders Colding-Jorgensen, who studies diffusion of information in Denmark, posted a hint to his 125 friends on Facebook that the city would destroy the Stork Fountain. The news went viral. His Facebook gained more than 27,500 members in no time. This kind of mobilization typifies low-risk

collective efforts, such as crowdsourcing in finding a lost phone, which Shirky (2008) points out in *Here Comes Everybody*. Morozov claims the quantity of people joining online mobilization does not make any impact if the quality of their engagement to push for change is superficial. While it may be true that new media technology allows for new kinds of activism, Morozov emphasizes that mobilizing activism without leaders or clear objectives can debilitate traditional yet efficient forms of movement (Morozov, 2011).

Castells (2012) offers a different view on this leaderless, horizontal communication in digital networks, arguing that it is the quickest, most autonomous, and most malleable to reprogram and expand. The "new species of social movement," according to Castells, is characterized by communication between individuals engaged in movement (Castells, 2012, p. 15). This new kind of online mobilization is situated in the characteristic of the network technology propelled by shared experiences. He points out the shared feelings of humiliation, suppression, or exploitation that prompt people to fight for dignity. The faster and more interactive communication processes are at disseminating these emotions, the more likely it is that the collective actions are motivated by outrage, accelerated by enthusiasm, and motivated by hope.

McLuhan argues that any media "amplifies or accelerates existing processes," and introduces a "change of scale or pace or shape or pattern into human association, affairs, and action," resulting in "psychic, and social consequences" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 7). The Internet also amplifies and accelerates our experiences. Now with lower barriers to entry, such as the lower cost of Internet access, more people have access to the online world. Now in the United States, 84% of households have a computer and 73% have a broadband connection (Rainie & Cohn, 2014). Benkler (2006) argues that after economic

activities such as those on eBay or Amazon dominated the Internet when it was first available, cultural and social production as well as decentralized nonmarket individual activities, such as posting home movies or cat videos, have followed. The Internet is a "technological-economic feasibility space" (Benkler, 2006, p. 31). Such change in the space will alter patterns of production, information exchange, and culture in a manner that reconfigures our practices. This includes the way people express their political views and resistance. This reconfiguration is manifested in the Internet as the terrain of contestation. It allows a space for Deleuzian "lines of flight" for people to advocate for their causes.

WikiLeaks is one of the most outstanding examples of digital contestation. The website WikiLeaks.org, run by Julian Assange, released the classified U.S. diplomatic cables that revealed both text documents and video of U.S. military operations in Iraq. One video depicted graphic black-and-white aerial footage of a U.S. military helicopter attack in Baghdad. It showed the pilots killed 12 people, including a Reuters photographer and a driver. WikiLeaks later released this video with the title *Collateral Murder*. Pfc. Bradley E. Manning, now known as Chelsea Manning, downloaded the video clips along with 150,000 other diplomatic cables. Not only did the leaks expose atrocities in Iraq but they questioned what the U.S. government had done (Khatchadourian, 2010). Slavoj Žižek (2011) argues, "The aim of the WikiLeaks revelations was not just to embarrass those in power but to lead us to mobilise ourselves to bring about a different functioning of power that might reach beyond the limits of representative democracy" (Žižek, 2011, p. 9). In 2013, whistleblower Edward Snowden disclosed the most striking leaks about the National Security Agency's mass surveillance

program. Snowden also argued that the program poses "an existential threat to democracy." He added:

> I really want the focus to be on these documents and the debate which I hope this will trigger among citizens around the globe about what kind of world we want to live in… My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them. (Greenwald, MacAskill, & Poitras, 2013, para. 7)

Challenging states' practices is not limited to people with access to classified information or expertise in the technology of encryption. Individuals' demands for justice are amplified online, as in the case of Michael Brown, shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014. People questioned the state officials' and media's practices. Online social media networks have been used to get protesters' agendas to the public. Twitter erupted with the hashtags #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, which picture would they use? (Stampler, 2014, August 11; Vega, 2014, August 12) More hashtags, such as #MikeBrown, and #Ferguson, were created to mobilize support. People not only questioned police officers' use of excessive force against people of color but also the militarization of the police. Such criticism pressured authorities to respond to the issue. President Obama, for example, called for a review of the military equipment sold to state and local police (McPike & Ravitz, 2014). Images of these engagements as well as tweets and personal status updates spread across the country. The case in Ferguson prompted demands for justice in other similar cases of violence against people of color. For example, Eric Garner, who died from a chokehold in Staten Island, New York in July 2014, received more attention. After the Grand Jury did not indict Officer Daniel Pantaleo who was seen in the video choking Garner, people were outraged and took to the streets. More hashtags proliferated on Twitter, including #CrimingWhileWhite,

#HandsUpDontShoot!, #BlackLivesMatter, and #icantbreathe. The latest, #Justice4All, promoted the march in Washington D.C. on December 13, 2014. The march was joined by the families of Michael Brown and Eric Garner (Brewster, 2014). Social media such as Twitter was extensively used to amplify the issue and coordinate offline gatherings. Changes in policy regarding race might not be realized at this moment; however, the whole country is in conversation regarding police force that causes deaths among unarmed minorities and the justice system that protects the authorities. A large part of such conversation was intensified by what has been featured on social media networks.

In addition to these cases, contestations in the realm of environmental activism are no less vigorous in the online terrain. The Internet has been a place to campaign for promoting environmental consciousness. These are efforts to propose alternative world views. Step It Up 2007 challenged the economic practices and ways of life that contribute to global warming. This movement to address climate change is a remarkable case of activism mobilized online that later translated into international efforts to promote awareness about global warming. People signed a pledge on the website and organized gatherings in their own cities (Endres, Sprain, & Peterson, 2009). Other environmental efforts include transnational activism to clean up toxic environments as far away as China. This activism is made possible by the networked sphere. For another example, Greenpeace's Detox campaign challenged the global fashion industry to leave their textile suppliers that release toxic chemicals into rivers in China. The campaign identified consumers and top fashion brands as actors who could make positive change. Since 2011, the campaign has persuaded 20 fashion brands to avoid using toxic substances in their products and production processes as well as leaving Chinese factories that polluted

rivers. This was done through social media with an emphasis on the power of people—individuals, celebrities, activists, designers and bloggers (JulietteH, 2014, January 28). They are persuaded to tweet about the Detox campaign (Brunner & DeLuca, forthcoming).

These are examples of the contestations that activists launched, mobilized, and accelerated in the online terrain. Within the existing infrastructure, social, and economic systems, the Internet can be used as "lines of flight" to challenge established operations and consciousness. These activities reconfigure our ways of advocacy to consider and re-consider what we see in the world.

Background on Thailand's Tumultuous Politics

In the past decade, political turmoil has intensified in Thailand. Differing political views have increasingly polarized Thai society, dividing protesters into two general camps: rural grassroots anti-coup protesters and urban elite protesters. The start of the political unrest dates back to 2004, when the fervent Yellow Shirt People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) planned to topple the allegedly corrupt, democratically elected Thaksin Shinawatra. The media played a significant part in drumming up support for the movement. The PAD was mobilized by means of online media, such as the most popular online news website (manager.com), as well as cable television ASTV, owned by media mogul Sondhi Limthongkul. The PAD was not directly successful in ousting the premier, but it contributed to the political tension that led to the 2006 coup d'état[1], a landmark

[1] In his book, *The Coup for the Rich*, Thai-British political scientist Giles Ji Ungpakorn (2007) explains that the monarchy along with the military and the elite supported this coup because they shared contempt for the poor. He argues, "For them, 'too much

incident that prompted Thais to re-examine the undemocratic intervention.

On the opposite pole, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), later identified as the Red Shirt alliance, was formed as a movement to counter the coup. The Red Shirts were primarily made up of people in Northern and Northeastern Thailand's constituencies. This segment of the population directly benefited from Thaksin's populist policies, such as universal health care and microcredit funds. Their primary channel of communication was the local community radio stations, complemented by satellite television stations *People Channel (PTV)* and *AsiaUpdate*.

Attempts to overthrow Thaksin-backed governments have been recurring. After the coup, the Thaksin-backed People's Power Party won the general elections in 2008. In May 2008, Yellow Shirt protesters took to the streets, demanding that the government step down. These incidents led to the besieging of the Government House in August and climaxed with the weeklong seize of Bangkok's two main airports in December 2008. Then the court stepped in, ruling that the three government coalition parties were guilty of poll rigging. This decision prompted other coalition parties to switch sides and support the opposition party, the Democrats, favored by the monarchy, to form the new coalition government in January 2009.

Three months later, the Red Shirt UDD staged mass protests, claiming that their votes were robbed by an invisible power that maneuvered Thai politics through the judicial system. They demanded that the Democrat government dissolve parliament for new general elections. Their protests were unsuccessful, but these protestors returned in

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democracy' gives 'too much' power to the poor electorate and encourages governments to 'over-spend' on welfare. For them, Thailand is divided between the 'enlightened middle-classes who understand democracy' and the 'ignorant rural and urban poor.'"

the spring of 2010, occupying Bangkok's prime shopping areas and calling for a fresh set of elections. The Democrat-led/palace-backed government decided to crack down on Red Shirt protests, and on May 19, 2010, armed soldiers surrounded the protest sites. It was reported that 91 people were killed and many more were wounded. The mainstream media portrayed the Red Shirt protesters as gullible folks or terrorists "who burned down the city" (Thairath Online, 2010, May 20).

In 2011, the Red Shirt-supported Puea Thai Party won the general elections and formed the coalition government. However, the elite groups, once again, executed plans to topple this government. An antigovernment movement called the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) was formed in late 2013. It was identified by the tricolors of the Thai flag: white, red and blue. The PDRC's mass rallies in Bangkok intensified, putting pressure on the military to stage another coup. It eventually seized power from the government on May 22, 2014, and a new surge of protests against the recent coup cropped up in various forms.

The politics of social protests in Thailand are colorful, organized, and structural actions. The PAD, UDD, and the latest PDRC were mobilized with leaders on stage, giving speeches which were televised through satellite broadcasts or web streaming. These were organized rallies with hierarchical leaders. The case studies discussed in this dissertation are creative new forms of activism since martial law was in effect. This condition transformed the organization, forms, and spectacles of the gatherings. Protest leaders were either arrested or detained. Satellite television and community radio stations, the primary channels of communication among the grassroots activists, were halted. Therefore, the situation prompted individuals to arrange their own acts of resistance.

These actions thrived like rhizomes. Individuals organized their own public gatherings. Some, for example, hosted underground political radio talk shows or radio parodies. Others started their own YouTube channels, producing shows ranging from interviews with political activists to political gossip shows. Resistance in the digital networked sphere has become highly visible. People create blogs, administer Facebook Pages, and generate memes and selfies to advocate for their political stances. Networks of allies mobilize their political resistance on all fronts.

Chapter Overview

This project will examine people's rhizomatic adoption of different media and technology to produce truths and practice citizenship. It particularly examines decentered individuals' attempts to contest and resist by introducing their own visuals of truths. The three case studies examined include Performing the Violence of the 2010 Crackdown: Creating Lines of Flight, Forging Networks of Resistance; Memes as Political Participation in Digital Age; and Mockingjay, Mocking the Junta: Anti 2014 Coup Activism. Each chapter examines the "texts" that protesters advocated for activism. Like Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), each case study is a plateau that can be read independently. These visuals of resistance are exerting force in connection with the larger networks of resistance, connecting and incessantly transforming even at the time of this writing.

Chapter 2 discusses the new forms of protests that arose in Thailand after the crackdown on Thailand's Red Shirt United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) protesters in Bangkok from March 2010 through May 2010. More than 90 people

were killed and leaders and protesters arrested. The state's violent actions were deemed justified. Mainstream media framed these protesters, made up of grassroots people, as "terrorists" who had infiltrated the capital city of Thailand. In addition, the government imposed the narrative frame of menacing "arsonists" on these protesters. Therefore, this chapter examines the tensions that exist among competing narratives, challenged by performative re-enactments of the crackdown. People used their bodies to contest messages that discursively depicted them as an excluded population that deserved to be killed. The public performance was their "new media," serving as communicative means to present alternate truths to society. These public performances were the events for people to assemble, connect, and exchange stories, unmasking the brutality of the military, reminding society that people were killed at various places in Bangkok. Their performances formed new kinds of networks when public gatherings were banned by law.

Chapter 3 explores the digital terrain and the networked sphere that allows for new forms of political participation to gain traction. Given the proliferation of mobile devices and affordable data plans, Thai people are actively engaged in online networks as part of everyday life. In the midst of the latest political crisis, since November 2013 people have been actively interacting and expressing their political views in the social network sphere. Memes have been highly visible in Thai people's feeds, and this chapter examines the rhetorical force of memes in political expressions that are occurring amidst the continuously changing landscape of media communication. Memes compete for our attention as people update their statuses and the status of their culture on a daily basis. They are the ideal illustration of Deleuzian rhizomes traveling in assemblages of

networks. Instead of focusing on the binary positive or negative impact of memes, I argue that memes forge a new way to advocate, prompting us to create meanings, mobilize for engagement, and challenge our perception of truths.

Chapter 4 discusses the inclusion of symbolic acts and appropriation of gestures from popular culture in amplifying protesters' political expressions and conversations with the public. After the latest coup d'état in May 2014, Thai individuals took ownership of their political expressions, staging their own acts of resistance in prolific forms. Their "selfies" or DIY activism operated independently. This chapter looks at their self-activism captured in images, then shared on Facebook and Twitter.

The resistance has been organic with loosely organized activities. No speeches or demands were delivered at the sites. These were silent protests, generating selfie events. The reappropriation of *The Hunger Games'* three-fingered salute galvanized global allies and amplified these acts of defiance. The force of these visuals generated extralinguistic conversations with society and institutions of power.

Chapter 5 summarizes the theoretical framework in media technology and posthumanist ontology in scrutinizing visuals of resistance. The case studies examined take into account the assemblages of actors and actants, such as networked communication, cell phones, social media platforms, cultural production, and suppression from the authorities. These actants have varying forces in relation to and against others. They generate a variety of emotional and disruptive patterns that can be incoherent and fragmented, but consistent in their opposition to social unjust and institution of power. In this chapter, I elucidate the assemblages and rhizomatic visuals of resistance in networked communication. The latter part of the chapter also discusses the challenges for

activism on social platforms. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the digital network in regards to mass surveillance and algorithms that dictate what people see on their social media feeds.

This dissertation constitutes a perspective that advances scholarship in social movements with an emphasis on the force of the visual that thrives in the changing ecology of communication. I argue that individuals are now instrumental for digital advocacy. They creatively generate the visuals that function as critique, distributing and transferring new realities, defying unjust practices, and challenging the suppression of expression. Acts of resistance continue to transform rhizomatically and thrive at intensifying speeds with networked communication technology.

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CHAPTER 2

PERFORMING THE VIOLENCE OF THE 2010 CRACKDOWN: CREATING LINES OF FLIGHT, FORGING NETWORKS OF RESISTANCE

Sua Dang Pao Ban Pao Muang
The Red Shirts Burned Down the City

Tini Mee Kon Tai
Here People Were Killed

"Truth is a thing of this world, produced in multiple forms of constraints"
Foucault, *The Essential Foucault*, p. 317

"None of the actants mobilized to secure an alliance stops acting on its own behalf. They each carry on fomenting their own plots, forming their own groups, and serving other masters, wills, and functions."
Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, p. 197

At 5 o'clock in the morning on May 19, 2010, I got a phone call from my former colleague, the videographer who was dispatched to one of the Thai protest sites near the prime shopping mall. He said, "Wake up and turn on the TV to see soldiers kill people now!" On television, news outlets reported the soldiers' attempts to crack down on protest sites. At 1:30 p.m., the leaders of the Red Shirts or the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) announced an end to their protests as they turned themselves in at the nearby headquarters of the Royal Thai Police. Television news reported fires at numerous locations, including the building of Channel 3, the

protest site at Central World, and the movie theater at the downtown shopping mall. Streams of photos and video footage of burning buildings were featured on television. These images dominated most mainstream media of the day. *The Nation* newspaper's editor, Suthichai Yoon, likened the incident to the 9/11 terrorist act in New York City "No Thai would imagine that Bangkok would be burned this severely and horrendously."

Since March 2010, the UDD (the Red Shirts) had occupied this shopping district along with other sites to pressure the government to dissolve parliament and call for fresh elections. Their request fell on deaf ears. The military crackdown killed at least 90 people, mostly civilians. However, this fact was eclipsed by the propagation of portrayals of these protesters as the "arsonists" who "set the city on fire" despite a lack of evidence for such claims.

The violent end to the protests was a devastating defeat for the Red Shirts. The protesters, made up of people from rural areas, were ridiculed, injured, arrested, imprisoned, and killed. Their political requests were not answered. Meanwhile, urban residents in the capital city of Bangkok cried over their torched luxurious shopping malls. The Bangkok Governor mobilized city people to join the "Big Cleaning Day" campaign to erase not only the evidence at the crime scene but also the memory of the murdered protesters. Society at large did not question this message or the rhetorical function of the "cleaning," which was to cover up the state's killings.

The power struggle continued even though martial law prohibited public gatherings of more than five people. It was a fight over the prevailing narrative and how society should remember the violent incidents that took place in the heart of the capital city. Acts of contestation of the official narrative unfolded as public performances were

staged at the protest sites. Led by decentered individuals, protesters turned to their bodies as a means to communicate with the public. They were assembling on locations to generate the visuals of resistance. These machines, according to Deleuze and Guattari, "may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, p. 36). They were creating new assemblages of networks of political resistance after the previous assemblages were destroyed by the state. They adopted public performances as lines of flight, interrupting the official narrative of the 2010 violent crackdown. These actions marked the turn to the visuality in public protests that displaced mass rallies and orators on stage. These were decentralized and diffused forms of gatherings. They forged new forms of protests, innovating new networks of alliances with small groups, weaving "a supple and transversal network that is perpendicular to vertical structure" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 35). Under the restriction against gathering in public places for political rallies, these bodies, like rhizomes, transformed their resistance in the visual field. The Red Shirts performed practices of everyday life, such as appearing in public, going shopping, doing aerobic dance, biking in the park, or performing planking—lying horizontally on the ground. They "define a practice, proceeding or strategy distinct from any single combination; and form an unstable physical system that is in perpetual disequilibrium instead of a closed, exchangist cycle" (Deleuze, 1986, pp. 35-36). These acts perplexed the military, which is accustomed to hierarchical forms of organized rallies.

These protesters' re-enactments are assemblages of visuals, producing spectacles for society to see. Their bodies engaged in performance evoked public discourse, generating and transmitting other truths and knowledge (Conquergood, 2002a; Phelan, 1993; Taylor, 2003). Their public gatherings worked against an official archive that

justified the killings, and stipulated how these protesters should be handled. Although mainstream media portrayed them as the "others," "the perpetrators," "the terrorists," and "the arsonists," they have created lines of flight: their performances in public, memorializing the atrocious acts, retelling the events with their bodies.

This chapter examines the alternative kinds of political protests that proliferated in innovative forms after the brutal force of the crackdown demolished their prior rallies. Bodies at the site are actants while performances are nodal points, intensifying the connections in networks, rearticulating the dominant discourse of the crackdown. This chapter addresses the new networks and the visuals of resistance within existing limitations, and how the multiplicities of these visuals at the crime scenes contested the narrative of state violence against civilians and advocated for what they know to the public (see Figure 2.1).

This chapter includes multimethods with accounts from news archives, reactions expressed on social media sites, and my participatory observations at the protest sites as well as the protesters' public performances at each commemoration. Like practices in journalism and theoretical claims, it is not possible to assume ideological neutrality. Performance studies in social practices and advocacy are hardly free of bias (Schechner, 2013). It is crucial to be reflexive and aware of my own stance. As a former producer of news programs at state-owned broadcasters Channel 11 and later Channel 9, I witnessed the early days of political turmoil since the Yellow Shirt protests to oust the allegedly corrupt Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2005. On the night of the coup d'état on September 19, 2006, my news team barely escaped the soldiers who came to seize our television station. They halted the broadcast and later announced that the

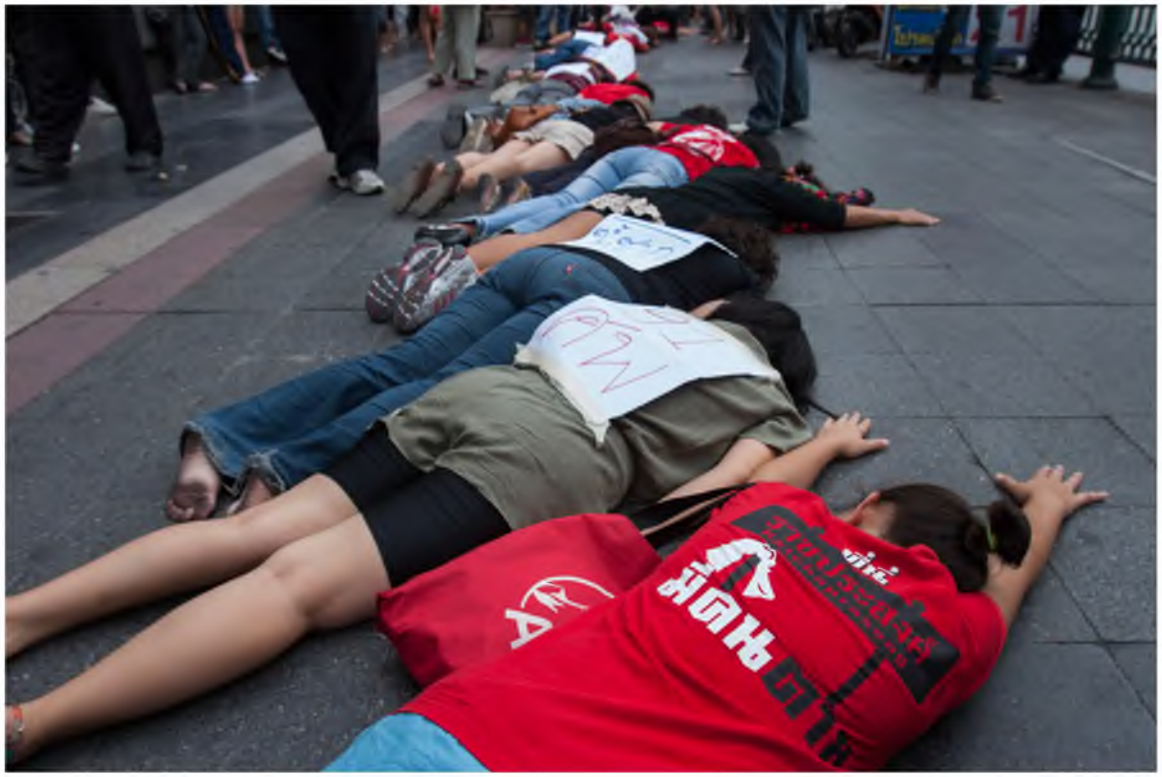

Figure 2.1 The Red Shirt protesters performed death on the street to contest the official narrative about the violent crackdown. Their shirts and placards retell stories about the violence, insisting that people were killed here and 91 were killed. (Photo: Vinai Dithajohn)

military had successfully seized power from the government. After the coup, tensions were heightened when a series of protests by the Yellow Shirts in 2008 culminated in the siege of Bangkok's two main airports. After the change of government, the UDD Red Shirts launched its protests from 2009 to 2010. As a television news producer, I saw raw footage of the violent protests from both archrivals, the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts. A number of scenes were censored to comply with the broadcaster's policy. Trying to make sense out of what I saw in the raw footage, I observed the protests outside of work, taking photographs of both camps. After the crackdowns on April 10 and May 19, 2010, I visited the sites and talked to protesters, as well as some of the government officials in

charge of the crackdown. Therefore, I rely on my own experience when analyzing the performative actions of the Red Shirt movements in this chapter. I am well aware that the murky narrative and the depiction of the incident in this chapter will face challenges and struggles against the official narrative. The following section proceeds with the theoretical framework in performance and the network

Performance: Power, Knowledge and Lines of Flight

In Ancient Greece, gods were visible to humans. These gods were understood as spectators of mortals' actions and, at times, performers of spectacles for the mortals (Jay, 1993). According to Greek epistemology, knowing is gained through the state of having seen (Snell, 1953). Aristotle pointed out the visual aspect that necessitated knowing and feelings in the *Poetics*. He argued that a Greek tragedy was to be performed rather than narrated. It was acted out to arouse feelings of pity and fear, and to eventually purge these feelings through catharsis. The links between performance, knowledge, and seeing is imbued in the word *theatre*. The term derives from the same origin as *theory* or *theoria*, which conveys the meaning of looking at assiduously, or to behold (Levin, 1987).

The field of performance studies rests on the visuals of bodies engaged in a variety of practices and activities. Richard Schechner (2013) defines performances as actions—a "broad spectrum" or "continuum" of human actions (Schechner, 2013, p. 23). It includes, but is not limited to, theatrical performance, drama, ritual, sports, and entertainment. It can embrace everyday life practices of gender, race, or class. Butler (2006) explains this as performativity. Similar to Derrida's concept of citationality, performativity refers to people performing practices through a repetition of actions that

have been practiced before. Performativity is the set of conventions and values marked on the body, then performed through the body to demarcate identities. Butler's point on performativity that rests on citationality and repetition makes visible the normalized practices in society. The norms to essentialize gender and identities of bodies are not natural, or biological, but constructed and repeated. This understanding opens up the possibilities for alternative ways of thinking and being. Therefore, dominant citationality can be contested by performativity. Judith Hamera and D. Soyini Madison (2006) add that performativities, vigorously layered in everyday practice, can be heightened and engraved in cultural performances. They argue "it is in cultural performances where performativities are doubled with a difference: they are re-presented, re-located and re-materialized for the possibility of a substantial re-consideration and re-examination" (Hamera & Madison, 2006, p. xix).

Performance can be a crucial site of power and knowledge (Alexander, 2011; McKenzie, 2001; Taylor, 2003). Diana Taylor (2003) argues that performance carries the possibility of challenge, connoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, a means of intervening in the world. It allows us to push the boundary of what we see as "knowledge." Knowledge production should not be limited to just fixed, static, or official stories. Michel de Certeau's argument, "What the map cuts up, the story cuts across" suggests that knowledge production can lie in two different domains: the map refers to official accounts while the story refers to practical, embodied everyday life (de Certeau, 1984, p. 129). Similarly, in *The Archive and the Repertoire,* Taylor (2003) argues that in Western culture, knowledge comes from the technology of writing which has replaced and has excluded embodiment. However, the embodied expressions have

persisted and continue to transmit knowledge through rituals, dances, funerals, colors, and other visual expressions of power. These embodied performances have served as a form of knowing—a system to store and transmit knowledge. She points out the interaction and tension between the *archive*, referring to the lasting materials such as texts, books, documents, or buildings, and the fleeting *repertoire*, signifying the embodied expressions such as dances, spoken words, rituals, or sports (Taylor, 2003, p. 19). The archive of texts is a "stable signifier" of the government of authorities that allows for the extension of control over distance and time. In the process of the archive, power mediates what is included and what is left out. In contrast, the repertoire — performances, orality, dance — is less permanent. These are "ephemeral" and "non-reproducible" knowledge (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). To transmit knowledge, the repertoire requires people's presence and participation in the production and reproduction of knowledge by means of being there.

Performance as a way of knowing and communicating what is known in society can be co-opted for social advocacy. In Madison's *The Acts of Activism: Human Rights and Radical Performance*, performance can be contestation and activism (Madison, 2010). It is seen as "tactics" to advocate for human rights and social justice. Bodies can be a site of contestation, a means to assert subjectivity, human agency that is bolstered by subjugation to institutions of power and ideology (Anderson, 2010).

This chapter takes performance as a line of flight or *fuite*, covering "not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a *point de fuite*)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xvi). The Red Shirts' performances were adopted to create new possibilities and new forms of

connections—a line of flight. These public performances were staged when other political activities were prohibited. Individuals engaged in these performances in public places. The visuals of these actions produced the flow of truths, contestations of official narrative, and accounts of traumatic experiences of the crackdown. Performances were the points to assemble, connecting and aggregating new alliances, extending the networks of resistance.

Performances and Actants in the Network of Resistance

In a posthuman age, performance can be viewed beyond individuals in the humanities. Public performances discussed in this chapter are new ways to resist and contest the government's violence within the existing state apparatus that suppressed displays of defiance. These public performances created new networks. Each performance served as the connecting point to intensify networks of resistance. The interdependence with bodies, digital communication, objects, and abstract and material elements are part of these networks. Similar to Deleuze and Guattari, Bruno Latour posits the ontology of a network in which subjects and objects are situated on the same ontological footing. For Latour, apples, bees, vaccines, subway trains, and radio towers can all be included in the study of philosophy. These "actors" or "actants" are linked together at nodal points. Harman (2009) explains that "such actors are not mere images hovering before the human mind not just crusty aggregates atop an objective stratum of real microparticles, and not sterile abstractions imposed on a pre-individual flux or becoming. Instead, actors are autonomous forces to reckon with, unleashed in the world like leprechauns and wolves" (Harman, 2009, p. 6). Humans and nonhumans are actors or

actants. There is no "a priori" order. This is contrary to the notion that privileges an individual or human. An actor is not simply an intentional individual but anyone or anything that acts, exerting its forces on other things in networks.

Latour emphasizes that the strength of a network derives from dissemination, multiplicities, and the meticulous mustering of weak ties instead of purity and unity. He argues, "This feeling that resistance, obduracy and sturdiness is more easily achieved through netting, lacing, weaving, twisting, of ties that are weak by themselves, and that each tie, no matter how strong, is itself woven out of still weaker threads" (Latour, 1996, p. 2). The concept of ties in the network refutes "the tyranny of distance" (far/close), scale (big/small; macro/micro), and the spatial dimension (inside/outside). Rather, the network should be examined with regard to how an actant might be strategic via the connections it commands and whether a connection between two elements is established (Latour, 1996).

This ontology of networks is useful for the study of social movements and political resistance to consider how things and people produce force in this network. Latour gives an example of imperialism, arguing that it was not the colossal center but a chain of spiritual, intellectual, and economic forces. The Spaniards did not defeat the Aztecs via the power of nature liberated from fetish. Rather, they achieved this via "an assemblage of priests, soldiers, merchants, princes, scientists, police, slaves" (Latour, 1988, pp. 202-203). Nonhuman objects and other actants should be included in the assemblage to understand their forces, not reduced to rhetoric, logocentrism, or dialectics.

Performances can be the nodal points for other actants—people, visuals, words, shouts, practices of everyday life, truths, or accounts of trauma—to connect. These

fragments were pieced together to form new visuals of resistance and new truths. They were working against the assemblage of a dominant narrative produced by the state via its faithful alliances that spoke for it.

The Framing of News Narrative in the Official Archive

The dominant public narrative of the Red Shirt protesters, produced by official accounts from the Thai authorities, rhetorically constructed the Red Shirts as perpetrators who disrupted peace in the capital city. The authorities framed sets of narratives that worked in favor of their decisions. Within its network, the media aggregated the construction and maintenance of interpretations of events such as this. After these narratives were published and broadcast, they became the archive of how the past crackdown and violence should be remembered. The following section examines the actants that exerted force in the portrayals of the Red Shirts, particularly how they were "framed" in news narratives. This is instrumental in contributing to how the public remembers the Red Shirt protests, how the bodies wearing the Red Shirts were framed, and how the public came to accept the violence in the crackdown. The acceptance of this frame aggregated new allies—the people in Bangkok who eagerly partook in the Big Cleaning Day to mark the "new beginning"—negating the Red Shirts' political requests and their struggle to be heard and the fact that they were handled with violence. This rhetorical act was to erase such violence. At the same time, their acts to clean up the place were staged to etch the new narrative, memorializing the buildings torched while highlighting their efforts and identities as the city people who engaged in the act of restoring the city. This foregrounds the acts of contestation of the narratives of the May

2010 crackdown, the subsequent struggle over truths of the incidents, the network of alliances that re-enacted performances of violent acts to rearticulate truths, and knowledge of the traumatic events. The next section proceeds with the actants assembled to depict the archive that gained strength through the government and its alliance's dissemination.

The Framing of the Raging Red Shirts

Originally derived from the influential social theorist Erving Goffman (1974), "framing" refers to the way individuals organize and structure their experiences. Individuals' subjective experiences, according to Goffman, depend on "the rules or premises of a primary framework, whether social or natural" (Goffman, 1974, p. 247). Social reality is malleable according to the frames that individuals adopt; meanings are constructed and negotiated within the parameters of a given frame. Framing has spawned research across various disciplines, such as economics and psychology (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), sociology (Snow & Rochford, 1986; Snow & Benford, 1988), and political communication (Chong, 1993; Druckman, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and generated more insights into the framing effects on macro- and micro-levels (ranging from personal decision-making to shifts in public opinion). Even if regarded as a "fractured paradigm" (Entman, 1993), framing has proven a fruitful concept that aids our inquiries into and understanding about cognitive and behavioral responses in various arenas. This section discusses how framing in news narrative affects people's perception of the Red Shirts.

News Frames and Framing Effects

The social construction of meaning through frames can be understood in multiple variations. While Goffman (1974) posited framing as the organization of experience, framing research branched out to investigate other aspects, including emphasis frames, journalistic frames, and value frames. These frames affect how people understand issues presented in news media.

Druckman (2002) posited the emphasis framing effect that occurred when certain information is highlighted. Individuals focus more on the highlighted aspects or features of the message or issues. Chong and Druckman (2007) argued that with emphasis frames, individuals are more likely to think of the potential relevance of what is emphasized. This serves as the basis that individuals use to make judgments.

For journalistic frames, Iyengar (1991) pointed out that the press media tend to solely focus on a case study or an event without the context—the "episodic" news frame. This simplifies complexities of social problems and reduces them to episodes with minimal evidence, disconnected from the broader context (Iyengar, 1991). In addition, news frames with salient attributes could implicitly activate patterns of thoughts and feelings, and frames could activate people's knowledge and "switch trains of thought," affecting people's reactions (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers 1997 and 1997b).

Frames with values determined by political activists or certain ideological standpoints might compete with one another. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) and Druckman (2001) argued that framing and reasoning devices affects people's tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). When the KKK rally is framed as "free speech controversy," it highlights the civil liberties at risk. Therefore, people exposed to this

frame show more tolerance for the KKK. In contrast, if the news is framed with public order, people show less tolerance for the KKK's gatherings. Frames in news media could influence people's opinions by highlighting particular values, information, or other concerns (Nelson et al, 1997; Pan & Kosicki, 2005; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004).

This section draws from the description of scenes depicted in the news media's narratives—the framing of the Red Shirts' protests. The media, either falling under the government's direct control or resorting to self-censorship, framed the Red Shirt protesters' march to the city in a negative light even before they arrived.[1] The frames of raging Red Shirts and terrorists were made prevalent.

The Raging Red Shirt Frame

The week leading up to the Red Shirts' march to Bangkok, popular daily newspaper *Thairath* reported on weapons stolen from the military's armory along with news about raids on illegal factories that produced M79 grenade launchers (Thairath Online, 2010, March 7). At the same time, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva was quoted as saying he was tipped off that there would be terrorist acts during the rally in March (Thairath Online, 2010, March, 7). The authorities attempted to stop the Red Shirts from entering the capital city by setting checkpoints along the highways. As they arrived at Bangkok, the Red Shirts were reported as reckless invaders. *Thairath* headlined that they

[1] It is worth noting that at Channel 11 where I was working as a contracted producer for the National News Bureau of Thailand (NNT)'s news talk show, there were "mob drills" for its employees to evacuate if the Red Shirt protesters seized the station. The drills informed the staff on the directions to leave the station via the adjacent office building if the front gate and the back gate were sealed off. This precaution reflects the predicted turmoil that the Red Shirts might cause. This might be based on the previous Yellow Shirts' raid at the station in 2008.

"broke through the checkpoints easily, massive number of protesters show up in Bangkok. The state is to announce the Emergency Decree. Violent leaders were all there. Protesters give the government the 4-day deadline to dissolve parliament" (Thairath Online, 2010, March 14).

This news further highlighted accounts of violence, allegedly staged by the Red Shirts. More cases of M79 grenades attacks were featured, starting from an incident at the 1st Infantry Regiment, where two soldiers were injured (Thairath Online, 2010, March 16). Another incident was the report on the Red Shirts raided 11 locations, ignoring the CRES' commands (Thairath Online, 2010, April 6). The coverage of the Red Shirts showed that they were not peaceful protesters as claimed by the protesters.

The frame of raging Red Shirts ensued. They marched to different locations in Bangkok, paralyzing the traffic in the city. After the government suspended the Red Shirts' PTV satellite broadcast, they marched to the satellite company, Thaicom, to demand an uninterrupted satellite signal. It was reported that the Red Shirts confronted the soldiers and seized their guns, ammunition, and tear gas canisters. The Red Shirts returned these to the police. Their request to reconnect their satellite signal was met at 5:00 p.m. before the protesters dispersed (Thairath Online, 2010, April 9). *Thairath* headlined, "The Red Mob Defies CRES, Raided 11th Infantry and Thaicom" (Thairath Online, 2010, April 9). Through news portrayals, the Red Shirts' mass rallies disrupted the city people's lives and inconvenienced Bangkok commutters.

The violence escalated the following day, April 10, 2010, when clashes between the authorities and protesters erupted in the afternoon at the Makhawan Bridge, close to the United Nations Office. This was where the Red Shirts stationed to prepare food. The

area was "reclaimed" by the military, which decided to use force to disperse these protesters. A former co-worker of mine got shot in his left leg. More violence erupted in the evening. Thairath headlined, "*9 Dead, 500 Injured. Mayhem*" (Thairath Online, 2010, April 11). High-velocity weapons such as M79 grenades were fired. The government argued that the "Black Shirts" were helping the Red Shirts by firing back at the soldiers (Matichon Online, 2010, April 11). In this fatal clash, Army Gen. Romklao Tuvatham, who led the crackdown on the Red Shirts, and Reuters' camerman Hiro Muramoto were killed at the scene. Many others, both military and Red Shirts, were also killed and injured. It is still not confirmed who the "Black Shirts" are. However, this was the landmark event that reaffirmed the claim that the Red Shirts were armed, reinforcing accounts of menacing protesters that were already lodged in people's memories. The accounts of who the Red Shirts were and why they wanted to protest in Bangkok were absent in the media narrative. The daily news reports were merely episodes of what the Red Shirts did and where it happened. Never were there in-depth news narratives that explained their political struggle and why they came to protest in the city.

The Terrorist Frame

Another enduring frame of the Red Shirt is "terrorist," a term popularized after the crackdown. The government and military quickly adopted this term to justify their use of force. The term "terrorists" labeled and marginalized these protesters as the others—the faction that must be stopped. The rhetorical use of this term forged the dominant rhetoric that led the general public to agree with the state killings.

The protesters were pitted against the Thai state in the crackdown. *Thairath*

headlined that the Centre for Resolution of Emergency Situation (CRES) charged one of the protest leaders Nattawut Saikeu as "the terrorist" (Thairath Online, 2010, May 19). Other protesters were headlined as "arsonists" (Thairath Online, 2010, May 19). The newspaper also reported that after the leaders surrendered, "hard-core protesters went mad, rioting, setting fire in Bangkok and provinces. Central World (the shopping mall) torched after soldiers in armored cars executed the Python Conscription operation, surrounding the protesters….The protesters fought back" (Thairath Online, 2010, May 20). Detailed portrayals of terrorists were featured in the following days. Thairath news reported, "Weapons found in Temple allegedly belong to protesters" and "a vehicle loaded with explosives found at the scene. Fortunately, soldiers were able to defuse the bomb in time" (Thairath Online, 2010, May 22 and 23).

The discursive construction of terrorists was officially and repeatedly reiterated by the authorities themselves. In the CRES press conference, presided over by Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Tuangsuban and joined by 40 diplomats, CRES Spokesman Col. Sansern Kaewkamnerd argued that the Red Shirts' protests escalated into "full scale terrorism." The arson and burglary were "systematically planned in advance and orchestrated by those living abroad (Thaksin Shinawatra) and in Thailand. The CRES was reported that it was able to trace the mastermind and the terrorists that were among the protesters" (Matichon Online, 2010, May 22). The press conference also featured video clips of the Red Shirt leaders' speeches that the government used to hold them accountable for arson. In one clip, Nattawut says, "I am very concerned. If bombs were going off and tens of thousands of soldiers approached us, hundreds of thousands of us would run in fright, knocking things off (in the shopping malls). The Red Shirts only

knocked off expensive stuff…such as Christian Dior, gold or diamond at jewelry shops" (People Channel, 2010, April 8). Another video clip of the other Red Shirt leader Chatuporn Prompan's speech on the Red Shirts' satellite channel was played. In the video he said, "The Red Shirts in every province should go to their city halls. When the crackdown starts, you can act on your own….Wait for our signal. If the television screen goes black, it means the crackdown begins. It's your call to do that."

Officials omitted the fact that the Red Shirts surrendered on the day of the crackdown. The moment the military surrounded the Red Shirts, their leaders announced on stage that the protests had come to an end to save lives. In the background, gunshots were heard. Then, Red Shirt leader Nattawut Saikeua told the protesters to walk to the National Stadium, along with their security guards, to go home. On the stage, the protest leaders did not give the protesters the signal to burn the malls or steal from the shops as they had mentioned in April. However, after the protest ended, the shopping malls at the site, along with city halls outside Bangkok were set ablaze. The incidents turned out the way these leaders had said. The arson was highlighted by the authorities.

It should be noted that the CRES and the government failed to show evidence that the protesters committed such acts. They immediately framed Red Shirts as terrorists who burned down the city. Such rhetoric subsequently marked these bodies as the "others" and "perpetrators" that "set the city on fire." This mediated the relationship between them and others in society. In the comment section of the YouTube video clip of the last moment of the protest on stage, people made resentful comments towards the Red Shirts' end of protests. One comment blamed the protest leaders for "leading them to death" (rubythaimv, 2010). The others said, "[they] die from stupidity, die from being hired, you

should all die," "The coward, scared of the gunshot. You are not that brave!," "[You] Incited them to give up their lives, but the leaders fled. Time to be disillusioned" (rubythaimv, 2010). None of these questioned why the authorities had to take the protesters' lives after they decided to end the rallies. The authorities rushed to conclude that the Red Shirts had burned down the buildings.

The shopping areas, occupied by Red Shirts and later transformed into protest sites, were theatrical displays of atrocities and tragedy. The mayhem, however, was understood differently among the public. The protesters experienced the traumatic events in which the state ordered the use of deadly force. But the bodies of the Red Shirts being shot had no place on stage. The backdrop of the scene was the images of charred buildings, burned by the Red Shirts. The people in Bangkok whose daily lives were disrupted by the Red Shirts' occupation at the prime shopping areas witnessed the trauma with different perspective. They saw the Red Shirts as arsonists who burned down the malls where city people loved to shop. They selectively remembered only certain events and erased the memory of the state murder, which was incompatible with the narrative they wished to keep. They ardently volunteered to create the new narrative of themselves at this public theater. They actively created messages on social media sites to mobilize others to join their efforts to "clean up" the city.

The Performance of Good Citizens: Cleansing the Memory of the Place

The crackdown on May 19, 2010 ended with images of the shopping malls engulfed in flames and other buildings in the city billowing black smoke into the skyline. The protest sites were torched and littered with debris and damage from the crackdown

and violent acts. The Red Shirts were portrayed as villains instead of victims, and the mass murder of more than 90 people was immediately swept under the rug. The Bangkok governor, who belonged to the same party as the government, hosted the Big Cleaning Day to mobilize the city people to come out and take part in cleaning up the charred buildings, and more importantly, erasing evidence at the crime scenes.

More than 5,000 people showed up on May 23, 2010 with cleaning supplies. Their public performance of sweeping the streets and scrubbing the walls at the protest sites in downtown shopping areas created new narratives of the place—the new event, embracing the "peace" that returned to the city. For these people in the city, the cleaning marked "a start of a new day." One participant said, "It's a beautiful sky after the rain" (Manager Online, 2010, May 23). They created new accounts of themselves as "good citizens" performing public services alongside Bangkok officials to restore the capital city. This newly created narrative underscored their joy upon learning that the Red Shirts had been made "absent" from the place.

Along with their embodied participation in cleaning, many volunteers also showed up with cameras to take selfies to record their participation. This event was broadcast on almost all television stations that day. Individuals compiled photographs of this performance and made music videos to be circulated on YouTube and other social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook. Media professionals and individuals adopted, propagated, and circulated these visuals of the cleanup, a collective civic participation and display of nationalism that severed their ties with the Red Shirts. Many commented on the music videos to say they were proud of being Thai (zarchitect68, 2010). One couple, wearing T-shirts with English words "Together We Can," expressed

their solidarity with others saying, "This is when all Thai people came together" (*Manager Online*, 2010, May 23). Others expressed their social identity, one saying "I feel like I'm a part of society. I work around here at Silom. I'm so glad we came and did this" (*Manager Online*, 2010, May 23). Another YouTube user complimented, "This is just beautiful beyond words" (Digit Camp Fanclub, 2010).

This video as a public performance and the comments left on it by city people revealed their relief, love, and pride in their participation as good citizens—the live theater that these individuals enacted. The Red Shirts were obliterated from the event. The "Together We Can" campaign further ostracized the Red Shirts, since "the society" that these city people understood was made up of the bodies of Bangkok residents. At this event, the narrative of the crackdown exclusively focused on the burned buildings, debris, and the damage the Red Shirts allegedly left behind. This set of narratives with such emphasis directed these people to see the damage of commercial buildings, touting laments on the torched shopping malls. "It's a shame because it reminded me of how beautiful it used to be with lots of lights, especially when I was here for the countdown on New Year's Eve. Now this is just what we have left." Another woman, commented with a shaking voice, "Personally, I hang out here often. There's nothing left. This is terrible" (Manager Online, May 23, 2010).

These reactions differed from those of bystanders at the lynching of students in the October 6, 1976 massacre, in that Bangkok residents did not witness the bodies of the victims. In the iconic photograph of the 1976 lynching, bystanders were smiling and cheering at the student hanged from a tree. Despite differences, the joy these city people expressed, the number of participants at the Big Cleaning Day, and the lament on the

charred shopping malls reflected their lack of empathy toward the victims killed by the authorities. City people believed they contributed benevolent acts to clean up the city they loved, ignoring the fact that they also contributed to the erasure of evidence at the crime scene where protesters, media professionals, and paramedics were killed. The narratives of the killings were either suppressed or justified.

Within this narrative, the lives lost, the bodies killed at the scene, and other truths of the crackdown could not emerge. The Red Shirts' rights, political struggle, and their lives did not belong to the place and the city people's truths. The latter eagerly cleaned up the shopping areas, and supplanted the trauma of the crackdown that the Red Shirts suffered with the uplifting theatrical enactment they performed.

The pain and the rubble the city people thought they eradicated were just swept under the rug. Contestation of the public memory ensued with embodied participation on this very location after the cleanup.

Public Performances: The Embodied Contestation of Power and Knowledge

In the evening of May 19, 2010, after the Red Shirt leaders surrendered and protesters dispersed, six people were shot dead inside a temple's compound. The news reported that they were killed by the "Black Shirts." The government denied its involvement but those men were never arrested. Nor did the public criticize the government's actions to resort to violence, using live bullets with signs reading "Live Firing Zone," handing death to anyone in designated areas. The government exclusively held a monopoly on violence (Conquergood, 2002a). The deaths and casualties from the

use of violence were investigated; however, no one was held accountable for those violent acts. As discussed in previous sections, the Red Shirts had been thought of as the troublemakers, disrupting the capital city and burning down buildings and shopping malls.

While Thai authorities wanted to engrave their narratives of justified violence, making it immutable, the Red Shirts and the people in the provinces challenged this archive by repeatedly participating in public performances to make their argument. While writing and text have been privileged as the canon, performance can be used for knowledge transmission (Conquergood, 2002b). In this case, Thai people turned to their bodies, engaged in public performances to resist the hegemonic memories imposed upon them. The Red Shirts struggled to unmask the authorities' brutality against civilians to transmit their experience. They intervened in the process of the archive by using their bodies as the means to transport people to the past violence, re-enacting scenes at the physical locations where people were killed by the state. It was the first time Thai people had witnessed such contestation of narratives about the massacre immediately after the incident. In the previous massacres in 1974, 1976, and 1992, people were completely suppressed and it took decades passing before they were able to speak openly about those mass killings. The contestation was possible because it transformed from mass rallies to street performances, connecting actants that strived to introduce their truths to the world.

After the crackdown, social activist Sombat Boonngamanong founded Red Sunday,[2] a group of activists mobilized on Facebook to persuade people to wear red shirts

[2] In Thai culture, each day of the week is assigned a color of the day. For example, Sunday is red, Monday is yellow, Tuesday is pink. These colors serve as the basis of how the color-coded politics plays out. The current King was born on Monday; therefore, the

in public on Sundays. This practice of everyday life, along with street performances, disrupted the official archive. According to Sombat, this was strategically planned since Sundays are perfect for political activities. He explained, "It's a day off. People have free time." This also works well with the media since there are not many stories to cover on Sundays. "But being featured on the front page on Monday makes a huge impact," said Sombat (Asvavilai, 2011, August 17). These public performances on the street connected the mainstream media who translated their stories, although not as headlines or with elaborate details.

The following sections discuss the Red Shirts' public performances to aggregate new alliances in disrupting the official narratives. Their bodies engaged in these public performances are actants that rearticulated truths about themselves and the crackdown, calling for accountability and justice, and breaking the silenced trauma they experienced.

Rearticulating Truths via Embodied Performance

The Red Shirts' presence—the visuals of bodies wearing red shirts gathering in public places—were perceived as threats, troubles, and an unwanted sight. To the elite and city people, they were gullible in being hired to protest and die. The question never extends to why they had to die, or why the violence to take their lives was enforced. The bodies were remembered as "bare life" that has no political agency (Agamben, 1998).

The bodies in red shirts have no place on the streets of the city of Bangkok or in the archive. No matter how much the state wishes to erase their dead bodies from the

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color of Monday, yellow, has been associated with the King. However, Sunday or red is not any particular politician's or leader's birthday. It was picked as a symbol of stop or say no to the referendum of the constitution proposed by the 2006 coup makers.

streets or the newspapers, the live bodies sharing the identity of the Red Shirts, despite their deadly suppression, still exist in the country. These are the bodies with the will to pursue their politics and contest the undemocratic means that toppled the politicians they elected. With the Emergency Decree and martial law that gave the government the power to control its unruly citizens, the Red Shirts are Deleuzian rhizomes that merged with new elements, in this case, performances to resist the government and its alliances' narratives. These performances included appearing in public, everyday practices or religious rites. The following sections proceed with rhizomatic acts in public places, performing everyday life activities to produce the multiple visuals of their being and existence after the government attempted to take their lives and reduced their existence to the limit of "terrorists" and "arsonists." Their street performances of violence on their bodies rearticulated other truths about the past violent crackdown. The reenactments of the deaths on the streets brought to light the lives of civilians killed and held the government accountable for the order to shoot and kill them. Their assembling at the temple to make merit for the dead were the assemblages of connecting points in which survivors and relatives of the victims assembled to proliferate their traumatic accounts of their political struggle.

To Appear, to Assemble, and to Connect

> Life is more than breathing and living until your last day in this world.

Arendt argues that "to be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things make their appearance like actors on a stage set for them" (Arendt, 1971, p. 21). Appearing in public had

become difficult for many Red Shirts and their sympathizers after the crackdown. To proceed onto the stage and make themselves visible again means to confront the city people's contempt and to accept certain defeat through their identification with the Red Shirts. However, to appear was necessary as they continued living their lives. To appear is to resist falling into oblivion and conforming to the official narrative. The Red Shirts, despite their failure to achieve their political demands and with some losing their lives, still desired to live, breathe, and appear in Thai society.

Two days after Bangkok's Big Cleaning Day on May 25, 2010, social activist Sombat Boonngamanong, who founded the Red Sunday Group, initiated an event to connect the Red Shirts in new ways. He launched its campaign with the slogan "1 Year, 1 Million People." In the statement, he mentioned that people's rights were violated by the Emergency Decree, prohibiting any political gathering of more than five people. Sombat said he was the original Red Shirt, the one who initiated the idea of wearing a red shirt as a political statement to oppose the Draft Charter in 2007. He proposed people continue adhering to the practice of wearing the red shirts—the cultural resistance—while lessening possible confrontation with the authorities. To connect the Red Shirts under the existing law, Sombat persuaded them to "please wash your red shirt, take it out of the closet and wear it with pride." People were encouraged to wear red shirts every Sunday when they went out to meet their friends or families, shopping, visiting temples or having lunch, among other public activities (Prachatai, May, 26, 2010). Sundays were the days to make public appearances in red shirts.

The network of resistance was then visible, with the tracings of these actors as they moved and generated the visuals of their acts. The first few meet-ups were arranged

on social media, but the information was also distributed to people from one nodal point to another. They met at McDonald's,[3] the American fast-food chain, located at the corner of the intersection that the Red Shirts occupied as their protest site. It was also where they were subsequently killed in the crackdown. They appeared, had coffee, and exchanged stories of their past lived experience during the protests and on the day of the violent crackdown. The visuals of them showing up in public rearticulate the narrative of themselves as the Red Shirts, introducing a new set of reality as they desired to appear—alive, walking on the streets, sipping coffee at McDonalds, living their lives even though their rights to express their political demands were suppressed and some of their fellow Red Shirts had been brutally shot dead just a few days earlier.

The horror was still palpable at this crime scene although it was then occupied by cars and throngs of people. This place, the intersection at the prime shopping area, is tied to the recent incident. Sombat said in a personal interview that when he was driving past Ratchaprasong Intersection,[4] it invoked fear. "I felt the goosebumps," he recalled. "It was deeply painful" (Boonngamanong, 2015). To appear in public, particularly at this place,

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[3] While Western countries see McDonald's as the epitome of a globalized corporation serving an unhealthy menu, McDonald's restaurants served as the Red Shirts' meeting places for various protest sites. The McDonald's restaurant at Ratchaprasong Intersection was the only place nearby that was open for people there to buy food. It provided access to restrooms while the shopping malls in the area were closed. Several protesters I met said that the staff let some protesters use the restroom and sleep on the floor of the restaurant at night. This McDonald's was also the meeting point for protesters on later occasions, including the anti-coup in 2014. The other McDonald's at the Democracy Monument, a popular place for protests and political gatherings, was also one of the Red Shirts' places to meet. This was partly attributed to its location, spacious place with air conditioners, and the casual, welcoming nature of the fast-food restaurant.

[4] The term "Ratchaprasong" means the Royal Wishes. It is one of Bangkok's high-end shopping areas where prominent shopping malls are located. It is also the most popular venue for the New Year's Eve countdown.

was crucial for the Red Shirts. Sombat said "it is important for their [Red Shirts'] psyche. People felt the pain and fear. To be back and stand where they used to be was to revive their spirits. It is a way to break free from the feelings that weigh them down" (Boonngamanong, 2015).

To create an event for the Red Shirts to performatively appear, Sombat created the rite of putting red robes around the signage poles at Ratchaprasong Intersection. His performance of this rite was joined by Red Shirts and their sympathizers who resided in Bangkok. They eventually assembled at the crime scene. Sombat said, "Most were middle-aged women—'*Manudpa*[5]' (the Aunty Human)" as well as young people who were on social media (Boonngamanong, 2015). The rite became a repertoire, the weekly routine, as he came back every week to tie the red robe at the signage. This performance attracted more actants than he might have imagined. The authorities took his bodily act seriously since his live performance was well attended and featured in the news. On June 26, 2010, Sombat was arrested for violating the Emergency Decree. He was detained at a military camp for 2 weeks. After he got out on bail, he continued to return to tie the robe onto the signage until the signage was taken away from the scene.

Realizing such tension with the authorities, Sombat diversified the gatherings. The rite at this place with the embodied participants wearing Red Shirts was transformed into other bodily acts: aerobic dances, picnics in the park, biking, shopping, and a trip to the beach. These were get-togethers for these bodies to appear and connect. These live performances were later performed in other parts of Thailand as well, extending the

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[5] *Manudpa* or Aunty Human is urban slang referring to middle-aged or senior women who show stamina and at times assertiveness, stubborn actions to the degree of selfishness in public, ignoring others. Despite their condescending tone, this segment of the population attended the gatherings and public performances.

visuals of the resistance in the network. Sombat admitted that he was asked by one of the Red Shirt leaders, Nattawut Saikeau, to reach out to the other Red Shirts in the provinces. "This is not my wheelhouse," said Sombat. "I only focus on Bangkok. I never went to the country. But, it was the right request" (Boonngamanong, 2015). These public performances included shopping at the flea market in Chiang Mai, a trip to the Pattaya Beach in Eastern Thailand, biking in the Ancient City of Ayudhaya in Central Thailand, and biking and planting trees in Roi Et, in the Northern province, among other acts. These live performances were embraced by the Red Shirts. "I could see that they were left to themselves. They were hurt and had little room to be themselves. They were harassed [by the authorities]. When I was visiting Udonthani or Ayudhaya, many showed up" (Boonngamanong, 2015).

Sombat, self-described as the horizontal leader, steered clear from organized massive public gatherings with orators. Each gathering was loosely organized. At the end of each gathering, the plan for the following Sunday would be announced to keep people updated on the next gathering. The Red Shirts' websites, web boards, and forums as well as small group communication were actants that disseminated the information and proliferated the visuals of their performances. Although Sombat argued that aerobic dance and biking was simply to defuse the tension of political conflicts, the bodies that appeared rearticulated the official narrative of themselves, countering the rhetorical act of the city people cleaning up the city as if the Red Shirts were garbage that needed to be disposed. Their bodies were made to be absent from the streets of Bangkok; their beings were disposable.

These bodies came back to reaffirm their beings, set against the backdrop of the

cityscape, the fancy shopping malls, and the public parks, where their presence was disallowed and shunned by the people in power and city residents. Official narrative reduced them to troublemakers, the bodies duped to political manipulations, the arsonists and terrorists that burned down the buildings. Their appearance and their embodied performance in public interrupt the process of the way society excluded them. They were the desiring machines, eager to re-enter the stage, the scene, the country, and the world. Arendt posits the importance of appearance and the necessity for living things to "self-display" before an audience. She explains, "Every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence" (Arendt, 1971, p. 21). The Red Shirts' repetition of appearance in public, in front of audiences proliferated the visuals depicting they are alive with bodies that struggle to be seen, and recognized as citizens of this country, where their beings should be included. These were not terrorists. Instead they were Thai people with multiplicities of bodies and political endeavors.

Performing Death: *Tini Mee Kon Tai* (Here People Were Killed)

Public performances by the Red Shirts were mediating points for actants to connect and retell the stories of the incidents—their truths. Foucault (1994) argues that power mediates truths; "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it—a 'regime' of truth" (Foucault, 1994, p. 132). Power authorizes certain frames of the events and how the public should make sense of the violence that occurred, the deaths and the casualties in the incidents. In this section, I argue that in addition to the bodies'

appearance in public places to confirm their being and existence, these bodies made visible the deaths that occurred at the protest sites. They reenacted the past scenes of atrocities and performed vigils at makeshift shrines unveiling the bodies that were killed at the sites. These assemblages of truths countered the constructed truths that the government authorized, invoking people to see the other truths of those hurt or killed by the state. These protesters generated visual images that contested what was offered through the mass media. The bodies covered with blood and lying on the streets exerted force to the truths previously constituted of burning buildings, the Big Cleaning Day, and the Red Shirts as the villains.

The day after the deadly crackdown, the Red Shirts' rhizome sprang up on the street in another form. Sombat Boonngarmanong immediately went out to reenact the violence to the bodies of the protesters. His body made visible deaths that were obliterated from the scene. He was lying on the ground amidst the red-sprayed outlines of bodies—a familiar sight as the way police mark a dead body at a crime scene (see Figure 2.2). This *in situ* performance played out on locations for others to witness. His body, lying horizontally, was reenacting the unnatural death at this location. His solo act was the nodal point of rearticulating truths about the crackdown. The performance transfers the truths of the people killed by the authorities at the protest sites to other people in society.

A week after the crackdown, an innovative form of resistance cropped up at the crime scene. He materialized the attempt to connect with other bodies at the signage of Ratchaprasong Intersection. This signage connected those who were still alive and their expressions on the violent incidents. At the back of the signage, they wrote, *Tini Mee*

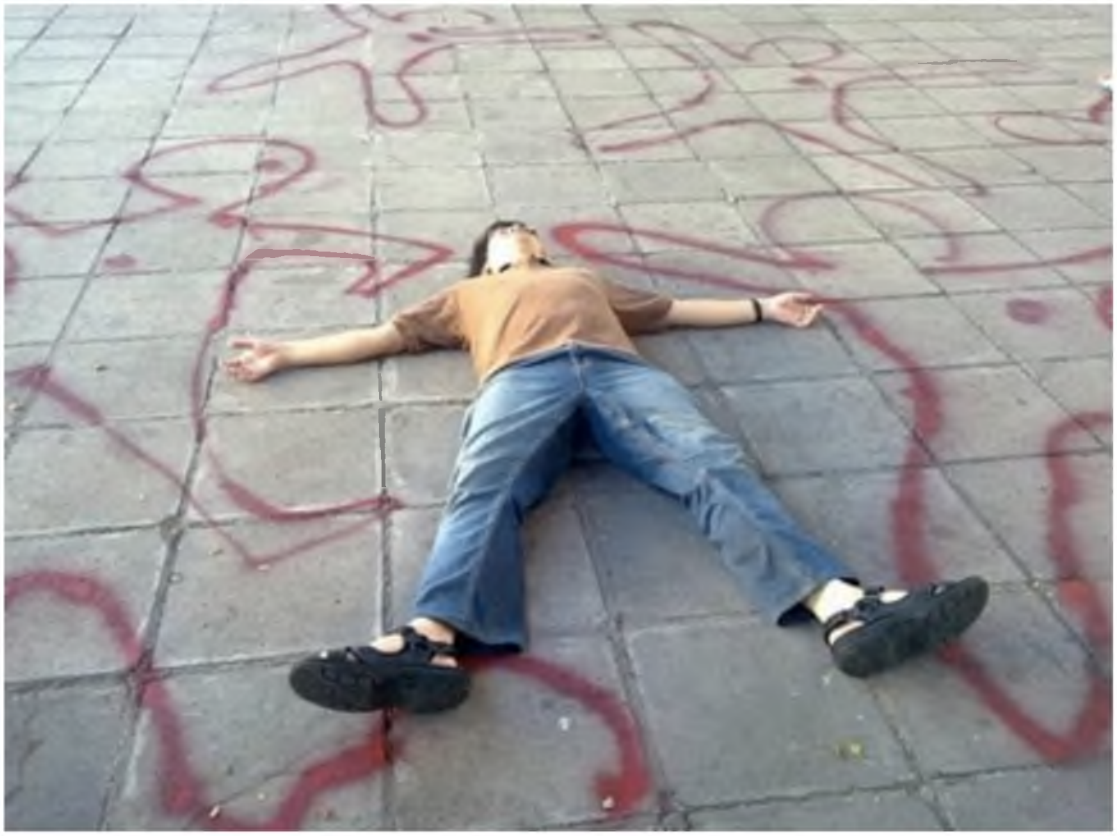

Figure 2.2 Sombat Boonngarmanong performs dead on the street the day after the violent crackdown. (Photo: Sombat Boonngarmanong)

Kon Tai[6] or "Here People Were Killed," and "I See Dead People" in English. When the act of tying the red rope was repeated the following Sundays, more messages at the signage territorialized the space. They read, "We Love Our Brothers and Sisters," and "I will be back." This performance, the signage, and the messages were connected to the mainstream media. Television news agency ThaiPBS reported on July 20, 2010 that the director of Pathumwan District said the signage was covered with white spray paint and "impolite words" (Tanngam, 2010). The television screen showed the words, "The signage was, therefore, removed from the site to be cleaned." This "vulgar" phrase had to

[6] In their performance, people also brought English placards that read, "People Have Died Here." In Thai language, the word *tai* is used for die, dead and killed. To reflect the nuance of the passive voice and the death caused by the violent crackdown, I opt for "People Were Killed."

be erased from the sign to comply with the official archive, in which the killings were obliterated.

Every Sunday since the crackdown, these "filthy words," *Tini Mee Kon Tai* or "Here People Were Killed," evaded being obliterated. They transformed and multiplied in other forms. These phrases were printed out on papers in both Thai and English. The inaudible written words were performed as the Red Shirts yelled out incessantly when the bodies performed death by lying on the streets, and repeatedly yelled, "Here People Were Killed." Their bodies interrupted the flow of pedestrians, calling attention to others to stop and look at these bodies on the sidewalk. It was a spectacle to invoke others to witness this again, transporting them to the past violence at this location. The appearance of the Red Shirts, engaged in the realm of action, redirected us to the framing of the massacre, countering it by exposing other truths silenced and excluded from the official archive.

On other Sundays in June 2010, the performances connected new actants, and more bodies proliferated the streets staging their theatrical re-enactments with more gory details. Their bodies featured pale white faces, stained with blood red paint. One man re-enacted the brutality of the shooting with props that simulated a brain spilling on the ground (see Figure 2.3). Their faces were painted in white. Some wore shirts that read "Here People Were Killed." Some pedestrians stopped to take photos on their phones while others looked away. The embodied performance also attracted police officers who were to enforce the Emergency Decree to weaken these ties. On July 18, 2010, one officer was speaking on the megaphone, reminding people that the Emergency Decree was still in effect. The police continued, "In the past months, this commercial area has

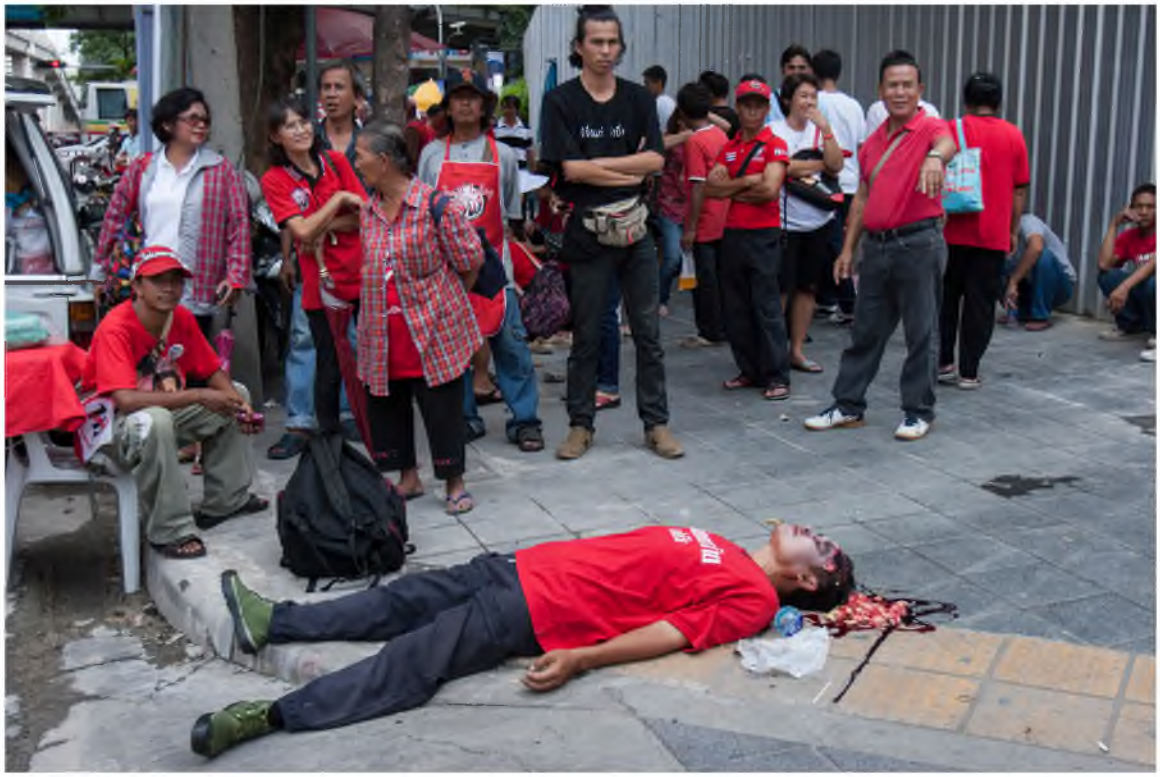

Figure 2.3 A Red Shirt protester re-enacts the violence at the crime scene and what he witnessed. Photo by Vinai Dithajohn.

experienced slow business. We have to cooperate to help them to recover from the hardship. That way we can live together." However, the lives lost through state violence were excluded from this police officer's words. One man wearing a red shirt yelled, "I saw people being arrested. People got shot." Suddenly, four men who must have been police in plainclothes came to grab him by the arms and legs and lock him up in a police van. He shouted his name, Natee Sornwatee, also saying, "I come by myself, not with five people. I don't break any law" (Rattanabhayon, 2010).[7] Another unruly body was taken away from the site because the authorities decided that he did not belong.

The people's performance, "Here The People Were Killed," extended its lines of

[7] The police did not file any charge against him. He was fined 100 baht (3USD) before being released.

flight. It traveled to and transgressed other protest sites where civilians were shot dead. At the "Strong Red Aerobic Dance," which Sombat arranged for people to wear red shirts to exercise in at Lumpini Park (Matichon, 2010, July 26), people shouted "Here People Were Killed," "We See Dead People" at the end of their aerobic dance exercise. The park is where the protests stretched and where protesters were killed, including one of the most prominent Red Shirt proponents, Seh Daeng, and Gen. Khattiya Sawatdiphol who was shot by snipers while giving an interview to a *New York Times*' reporter a week before the crackdown (Mydan & Fuller, 2010). People showed up in red shirts wearing ghost masks, or with their faces painted white and red. Before the event, there was a video clip, posted on Facebook, teaching certain people dance moves they could practice in advance.[8] Sombat himself performed a pantomime mimicking the victim being shot by a sniper. As the Red Shirts gathered around him to see this performance, the PA system interrupted his performance with the voice of a Lumpini Park staff member warning people not to bring dogs to the park. The male voice continued, "Now a lot of people are working out at the park. Please do not obstruct others who come to exercise here." One in the crowd yelled out, "We are not dogs!"[9] The voice reaffirmed their presence as human beings, refusing to move or leave the park. The bodies that appeared and engaged in the act of performance were a necessary disruption of the usual day at the park, bringing unusual past incidents back to life. The Red Shirts' bodies, performing dead, elucidated the lives that were taken away, the crimes committed at the park. The casualties from

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[8] The video clip of this aerobic dance training was deleted and is no longer retrievable online. However, from my notes, the video teaches the moves that promote the healthy life of the Red Shirts, with several other moves of kicking and elbowing the perpetrators, hinting at politicians who ordered the shooting.

[9] In Thai culture, dogs have a negative connotation, suggesting being a base, low life form.

recent protests were not limited to buildings and shopping malls. The violence took the lives of the protesters as well as other citizens who happened to be in the areas.

The network of resistance increased its strength when actants performed the spectacles of ghosts at other locations where protesters were killed. The Sunday after the aerobic dance, on August 1, 2010, the Red Shirts reenacted the scene of the deadly confrontation that took place on April 10, 2010 at the Democracy Monument. At 6:00 p.m., before reenacting the dead scene, people were singing the National Anthem, falling down on the ground and shouting, "Here People Were Killed." The repertoire of this act was staged again at Santipab Park, close to the Victory Monument and the sites where protesters were shot.

The spectacle of dead people sprung up at other memorializations, repeated again and again. Each time, the specter invoked the forgotten incidents of the killing. One man painted his face white to re-enact Reuters' cameraman Hiro Muramoto who got shot during the confrontation between the military and the Red Shirts on April 10, 2010 (See Figure 2.4). Other bodies were acting out the ghosts that came from the dead. In Thai belief, ghosts still linger, refusing to leave this world because they have unfinished missions or something to tell. They are gone but resist being absent. These specters appeared to exist in the here and now, becoming visible incorporeal beings, displaying a terrifying nature of power over life. The intention to destroy their bodies and take their lives did not make them disappear. They came back to haunt us. These were the specters that attempted to converse with us. The expected result is not in the revelation of shame

Figure 2.4 A man dressed up as the ghost of Reuters' Japanese cameraman Hiro Muramoto, 43, killed on April 10, 2010. His T-shirt read, "Die in Vain." His placard asked, "Who killed Hiroyuki? Which beast? You think you can shut our ears, eyes, mouths, media, global media to kill as you please?" Photo taken by the author.

or secret. Rather, it paved the way for people to experience secrecy that may shake or destabilize what we think we know (Derrida, 1997). The scene of the ghosts made visible what had happened to these bodies, showing the traces of blood, the pale faces, the wounds on the dead bodies. They came back to tell us they were murdered, contesting the government's labels on them as terrorists or arsonists.

The alliances for the victims grew. Relatives, friends, or advocates of the victims generated other spectacles of death, signifying "Here People Were Killed." These thrived in the form of vigils at makeshift shrines where dead bodies were found. These on-location vigils functioned as the rhetorical visual to remind people in power and others in society that people responsible for the deaths are still at large. This was also visible at the different sites. The Japanese Foreign Minister placed white flowers for Reuters' videographer Hiro Muramoto, killed in front of Striwithdaya School (Matichon Online, 2010, August 23). The staff from the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok perform this vigil at this location every year, reminding the Thai government that they never forget this life lost at this location. At Ratchaprasong Intersection, flowers and photographs of those who were killed in the crackdown were placed on the streets. Some of these photos portrayed gory details, with the faces and bodies covered in blood. Others were simply mug shots with names—the type of photos seen at Thai funerals. The photos were put on the street, as well as held up in people's hands as they walked around the protest sites. After the sun set, red candles were lit at makeshift vigils under the web of pieces of red clothes tied together, dangling above their heads. The lines of red clothes were connected together, extending and holding the ties and networks of the Red Shirts (see Figure 2.5). People brought the red birds made from folding papers into shapes of birds to put up at

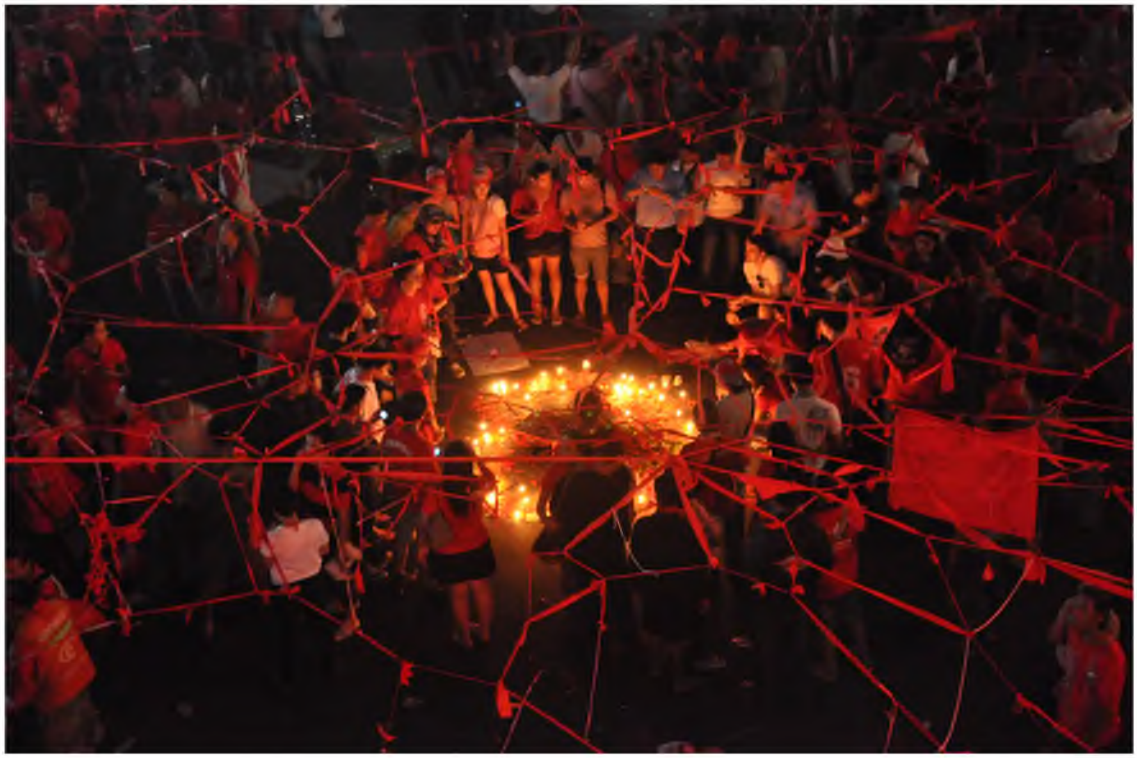

Figure 2.5 People put together this makeshift shrine to memorialize those killed at the Ratchaprasong shopping area. The red ribbon connected the lines of resistance on site. Photo taken by the author.

the scene. The postcrackdown trauma still lingered. Commemoration and memorialization were the assemblages that connected these people together, hoping to heal the wounds physically and mentally, although things could never be completely restored to the way they were before the crackdown.

These embodied performances made visible the lives that were othered, pushed to be the enemy of the authorities, surrendered to the sovereign power over life, their bodies taken away from the scenes. Other truths about the crackdown were never acknowledged in the authorities' archive. With no place in official Thai memory, the Red Shirts created their own space by reappearing at these protest sites. They used their bodies as media, re-

telling the atrocities on these locations. Their performances presented what had happened to their bodies, and those who were made absent, staging the spectacles of death that were censored in the visual media. It was their struggle to transfer the knowledge and awareness of the deaths and their traumatic memories, reminding the public of what happened.

Ai Hia Sung Ka, E Ha Sang Ying (The Fucker Ordered the Killing, The Motherfucker Ordered the Shooting)

The Red Shirts' performances continued to connect people and tell stories. At the 4-month memorialization of the crackdown, they broke the silence. From my participatory observation, thousands of Red Shirts defied the Emergency Decree and gathered at the shopping area on September 19, 2010. They started clapping their hands and repeatedly shouted: *Hia Sang Ka* or "The Fucker Ordered the Killings." It was unclear who started this phrase for the gatherings. The shout came from everywhere at the Ratchaprasong Intersection, at the signpost, the skywalk, and on the streets. It was an incessant chant. The protesters shouted out these words without any leaders telling them what to do or say. The word *hia* is a swear word. It reflects both angst against and awareness of the power that was behind the massacre.

The voice from these bodies called for accountability. These were calls for Thai society to come to terms with the question of who ordered the shooting and killing. Who would be responsible for the excessive force that entailed violence and death? The word *ai* was added to *Hia Sung ka (The Fucker Ordered the Killing),* which was later shouted with another rhyming phrase, *E Ha Sang Ying* (The Motherfucker Ordered the

Shootings). The expression was later toned down to *Khun Loong Sang Ka, Khun Pa Sang Ying* or The Uncle Ordered the Killing, the Aunt Ordered the Shooting. It suggested the male and female figures that were powerful enough to give such orders. The shouting of these words pointed to the "order" and the Red Shirts' understanding of the situation. The people these protesters mentioned in their shout were meant as ambiguous. They could be anyone, ranging from soldiers who executed the shootings to the then Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thuagsuban in charge of internal security. Alternately, they could be others who were in power at the time—onstage and backstage.

The most possible assumption of the *Hia* who ordered the killing, *Sang Ka*, could be attributed to Vejjajiva and Thuagsuban. At a subsequent commemoration, these protesters materialized the justice they wanted to see by putting up the cage that imprisoned the *hia*, who ordered the killing. Inside lay the effigies of Prime Minister Vejjajiva and Deputy Prime Minister Tuagsuban, who were in power during the lethal crackdown. Along with these two figures, there was an alligator bearing the placard that read, "*Hia Sang Ka,"* The Fucker Ordered the Killing. It was a play on the word *hia*, which also signifies an alligator (see Figure 2.6). This animal is culturally understood as a cold-blooded beast. Its presence in the cage invokes society to ponder who this additional figure might represent. Such mystery was for the public to contemplate the omission and ask who might have ordered such acts. As no one was held accountable for the mass killings in the past political struggles and rallies that culminated in deaths on the streets, this visual display of public rite communicates what these protesters would like to see in society—to put these state officials in prison.

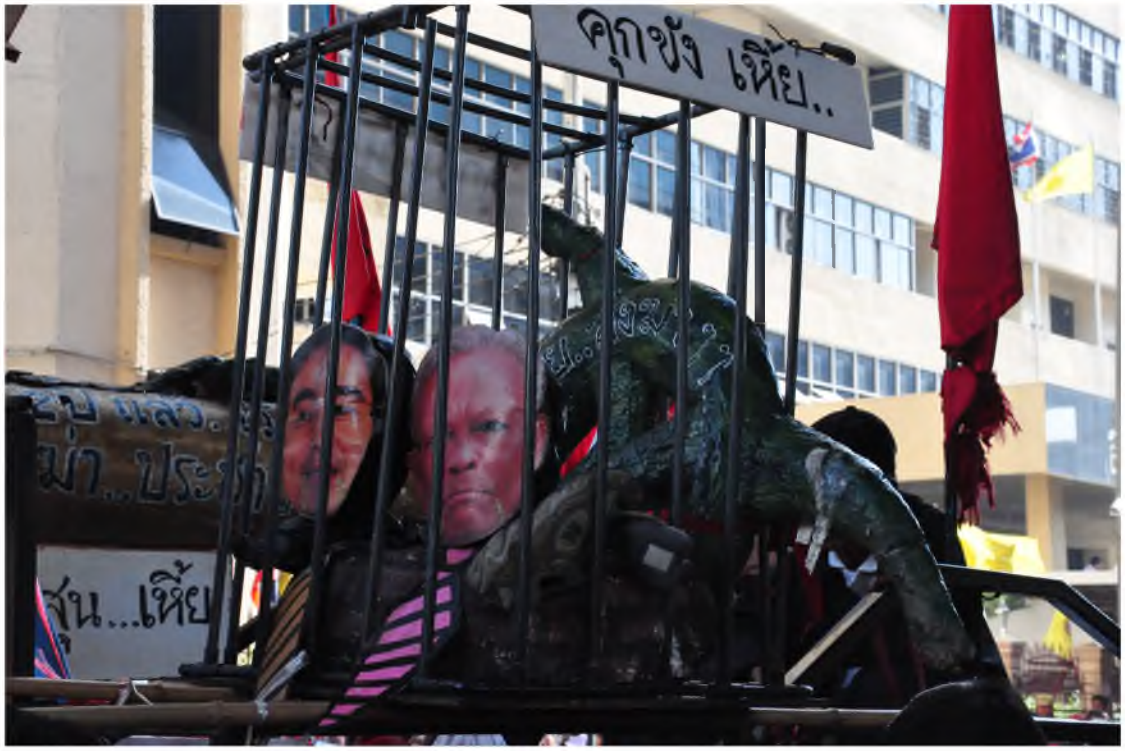

Figure 2.6 The Red Shirts visualized the parade of the justice. Inside the cage were the effigies of former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thuagsuban, and the alligator, *hia*, which also means a fucker in Thai language. Photo taken by the author.

This spectacle differs from the superstitious cursing rite *paoprik paokleau* or "burning chili peppers and burning salt," which was performed in political gatherings cursing Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon, the Army General who staged the coup in 1992. This rite reflected the people's wish to fight the people in power by righting the wrongdoing. It was "the exorcism of an invasive, malevolent spirit from the body of the nation" (Rajah, 2005). While it was true that such cursing rites, burning chili peppers and burning salt, were still performed at the memorializations, shouting cursing terms was an abridged and concise performance, facilitating people's engagement in the spontaneity and the sustained continuity of the acts. The voices uttering the cursing of state officials and the bodies that appeared in public were repeated for hours, the material contestation of the official

narrative about these protesters. They compelled onlookers to witness their public performance of anger. This starkly manifested their awareness of those who ordered the shooting and killing. The repetition of their performance indicated that they would not succumb to state violence. They openly accused state rulers to other spectators on site. The shouting was ephemeral. It was the *in situ* experience that necessitated participants' presence. This message was not featured in mainstream news media but their bodies vocalized this message at the protest sites publicly in the simplest form, from bodies to other bodies on site, from one personal communication network to another. This knowing cannot be unknown. It reaffirmed the phenomenon that the Red Shirt protesters are aware of political situations, confirming their political agency. This led to the symptom of *Tasawang Tang Paen Din*, meaning Nationally Disillusioned, which has infected one body after another. Their fight for justice continues.

Rearticulating the Crackdown: Recounting the Traumatic Memory

The state's framing of the crackdown is primarily dominated by charred buildings, the city people's rhetoric Together We Can, and their rhetorical act on the Big Cleaning Day. The deaths of civilians were erased. The voices of the victims and their stories of atrocities were silenced in the mainstream media.

The Buddhist merit-making at the Pathum Wanaram temple was a public performance that connected survivors, the relatives of the victims who appeared and told their stories in front of others. Their acts of telling allowed access to the past incidents, rearticulating what happened on the day of the crackdown, and made visible the trauma these survivors experienced.

According to LaCapra (2001), when one relives a traumatic experience, it can blur the line of the past events and the present and can collapse the distance between here and there. A person would feel renewed repression. Through language, the experience of the trauma may be repeated, re-enacted, or acted out. When the memory becomes accessible and when language works as the tool to maneuver or to give assessment, the person can start the process of "working through," although the expression of trauma might never completely match what they have experienced (LaCapra, 2001). Language has its limitations. What has happened or what is real is translated once it enters the domain of naming, transforming an event or an object into a word. As Lacan posits, the real is made impossible in such transformation into language; however, it produces the real as an accessible field in which it renders "presence made of absence" (Lacan, 1977, p. 65) for others to access. The surviving Red Shirts, through language, recounted their traumatic stories in public to allow access to the past traumatic violence that is no longer there. It brings back the past memory that is excluded from the official archive. The act of telling stories is performative as it reaffirmed their beings as civilians with faces and names, countering the government's constructed categorization of them as terrorists.

The survivors are living archives (LaCapra, 2001). A month earlier, on the day of the crackdown on May 19, 2010 the Pathum Wanaram Temple was where six people were shot by snipers from the elevated tracks of the skytrain. After performing the Buddhist service of merit-making for those killed at this temple, these survivors were telling others what they experienced on the day of the crackdown. These were stories told from multiple positions: at the temple's compound and from the positions of survivors and transformed political subjects. Their presence and performance in telling stories

created alternative truths of the incidents, unveiling the violence from the site of the temple. These stories competed in the domain of the archive when some of their stories were featured in the independent and mainstream media, countering the narrative about them as terrorists and arsonists.

In addition to the six victims shot dead at the temple, Uncle Buasri Toomma, 67, a farmer from the Northeastern province of Chaiyaphum was shot in the foot. He survived the shooting and worked through the past violent moment by telling people what he saw.[10] Feeling hopeless after the UDD leaders ended the protest, he took refuge at the temple. At around 5:00 p.m., he saw soldiers fire down from the skytrain's tracks. He tried to hide under a pickup truck, but his foot protruded and was shot, and it was bleeding badly. The soldiers told those lying under the truck to come out. One man did, raising his hands up in the air, but he was shot in the head before falling to the ground. Seeing that many were shot, Uncle Buasri decided not to come out while bullets were still flying in his direction. He waited until he was dragged out to receive first aid and passed out while being sent to the hospital. His wife also recounted the day as she had been on the phone with him and heard the firing through her old mobile phone, also audible through speakerphone to her four children and two grandchildren. She was reliving the moment of trauma as she told people about her conversation with her endangered husband. "He said they were shooting near him now," said Buasri's wife. "I told him to hide and then asked him who were shooting. He said the soldiers were firing from the skytrain's track. After the firing, it went silent. I tried to call him again but no answer.

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[10] The story was told at the temple and was featured on the independent news website, Prachatai.com. (Latour, On actor-network theory: A few clarifications plus more than a few complications, 1996)

My children said we had to accept the truth. If he made it, we would take care of him," she said with tears in her eyes (Chuachang, 2010). It took her 3 weeks to find her husband with the help of a local politician. Uncle Buasri said, "I'm glad to be back here but the loss should not have happened. I don't understand why Thai people had to kill each other."

Fifty days after the crackdown, paramedic volunteer Vasun Sairassami, 27, appeared at the temple to commemorate the incident and participate in the merit-making for the dead. He too relived the pain of seeing people get shot dead in front of him, starting from the first person to the sixth. His colleague was shot. With limited equipment, he could not save his friend's life. He said in tears, "In the last minute of his life, he died in front me inside the temple. It was terrible. What happened was terrible. I'd like them to admit what they did. I can't stand this!" Vasun was charged with breaking the Emergency Decree. He decided not to turn himself in. "I'm the witness to the shooting in the temple. The arrest warrant was not legit because I was a paramedic volunteer….If I could turn back time, I would not want this to happen. No countries did this. It is awful."

Another protester who survived the crackdown as the last person to leave the protest site at Ratchaprasong Intersection, Pusadee Ngamkam, 54, expressed her feelings on that day. She said she did not want to leave until we had democracy. She was facing the armed soldiers who came to the site after the surrounding buildings were on fire. "The soldiers came and I asked them if they wanted to arrest or shoot me. They said no. So I told them they could go ahead and shoot me. I'm waiting to be shot. At that time, there was nothing I could do for other protesters except for dying with them. They told me to

go home….Then some reporters told me to leave the site with them because a curfew was in place and I would violate the curfew if I stayed" (Kanhar, 2011). She expressed her traumatic memory at another gathering on stage at the 1-year commemoration on May 19, 2011 (which I also attended). She said, "I feel painful, angry, and hopeless. I am angry that our friends who fought with us with their hearts, sold their stuff to pay for their fight for democracy in Bangkok were killed like stray dogs….I am agonized to see that our friends were killed and then accused of being terrorists."

Traumatic experience can transform people into political subjects (Kaplan, 2005). In this incident at the temple, the trauma has turned a mother into a political activist. Payao Akahad lost her daughter, Kamonkade Akahad, a paramedic nurse shot multiple times inside the Pathum Wanaram Temple while trying to tend to the wounded. Payao, in a white polo shirt, sat on a chair in front of a framed photo of her daughter, sharing the story of her pain and rearticulating her daughter as a paramedic nurse, not a terrorist. As Payao was working through her trauma of losing a daughter, she relentlessly pursued justice for her daughter by speaking out, repeatedly telling her story at this temple to people who were there, as well as the press.

On the day of the crackdown, she was on the phone with her daughter at the temple. She thought her daughter would be safe at the temple's compound. "She was a nurse. She told me she would be okay because of the Red Cross symbol on her top.… Why killed her?" asked Payao. Her daughter died from wounds made by the 11 bullets in her body. Working through her traumatic memory has transformed Payao from a food vendor into a determined political activist. At almost all commemorations, Payao spoke for her daughter. The most important thing to her was to ask for justice for her daughter

(see Figure 2.7). Her pursuit of justice also extended to other victims. She led survivors and relatives of the victims to attend the hearing on the autopsy and ask for reparation from the government (Prachatai, 2010, August 23). She later spoke on VoiceTV,[11] "I want them to know my pain… I lost a daughter" (Asvavilai, 2011). She also questioned the authorities on the use of violence after the protest ended. She said, "She [my daughter] never thought ill of anyone. She was helping others. It was inside the temple's compound. She was lying dead inside a tent. She had nothing to fight back.

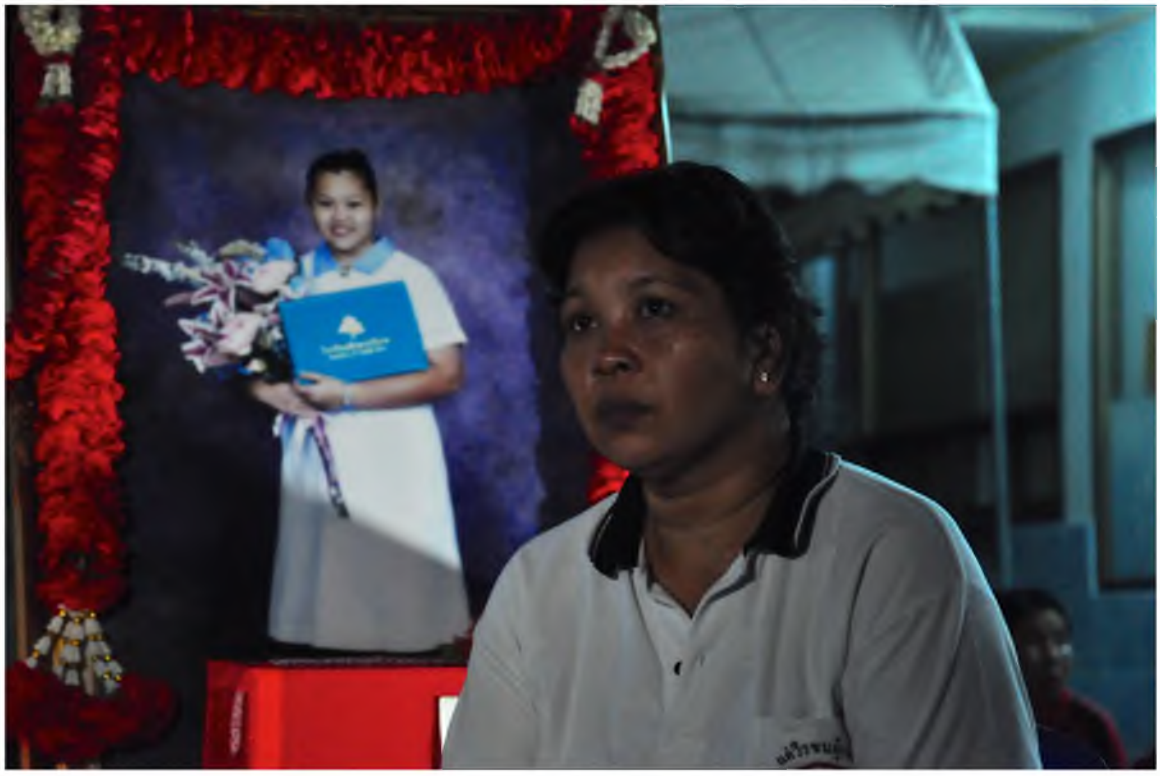

Figure 2.7 Payao Akahad, rearticulates her daughter Kamonkade Akahad as paramedic nurse, not a terrorist. Kamonkade got shot eleven times while trying to tend to the wounded inside the Pathum Waram Temple. Payao has since advocated for justice for her daughter and other victims. Photo taken by the author.

[11] VoiceTV is owned by Panthongtae Shinawatra, the son of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whom the grassroots people and Red Shirts supported.

At first the government said they (the Red Shirts) were terrorists. How about my daughter? Was she a terrorist? Around her were just boxes of medicine. What were the reasons to shoot her?" (Asvavilai, 2011).

These accounts of trauma and of the casualties of the violent crackdown were shared at the public performance of the religious rite. These actants created traces of what happened on the day of the crackdown, aggregating more stories and truths to be visible to Thai society. These stories told at the public gatherings interrupted the government's narratives that portrayed them as terrorists and arsonists.

Contestation of the Public Narratives Continues

As these performances were connecting other elements, stories, resistance, accounts of pain at memorializations, contesting the dominant narrative of the Red Shirts as perpetrators, legal processes proceeded to bring out the truth of the events. One of the truths that has been contested in the legal process was the case of the six people at the Pathum Wanaram Temple. On August 6, 2013, a Thai court ruled that the military killed these six people at the temple. Bullets were fired from the elevated rail track. No evidence of the weapons or the armed "Black-Shirts" were found (Ashayagachat, 2013).

Another court case addressed the fire at the shopping mall Central World, owned by The Central Pattana Plc. The court's verdict that would decide whether or not the Red Shirts were terrorists and arsonists would impact the insurance company by determining whether it would pay Central World for damages in the fire. The Central Pattana Plc filed a lawsuit against Deves Insurance Plc, which refused to pay its client for the fire, citing the government's report that the fire was a terrorist act. The Civil Court ruled on March

1, 2013 that Deves Insurance was to pay 3.7 billion baht (USD 108 million) in compensation to The Central Pattana Plc, deciding that the fire was not an act of terrorism (Thairath Online, 2013, March 5). However, the case was overturned by the Court of Appeals on October 9, 2014. The company announced it would file a petition to the Supreme Court. (ThaiPBS, 2014, October 11).[12] The legal battle continued. Still, fire prevention advisor to Central Pattana Pol. Lt. Col. Chumpoon Boonprayoon commented that it was not possible for the Red Shirts to torch the mall on such a scale. The mall had one of the best fire prevention systems in Asia with water sprinklers every 3 meters (Prachatai, 2013, January 30). The fire on May 19, 2010 could not be extinguished because firemen could not get to the building. He explained that soldiers guarding the area did not let anyone in, hinting that the government and the military must have intentionally let the fire burn the building. "There is no place in this world that authorities did not clear the way for firemen," he added. "Since the evening, no one cleared the area for fire trucks, and the fire was left to burn" (Prachatai, 2013, January 30). However, Pol. Col. Ruechakorn Jornjaywut told *Thairath* that the firemen who entered the area were stopped by protesters at gunpoint (Thairath Online, 2011, March 17). With conflicting arguments and differing sets of evidence, the public narrative of the Red Shirts as terrorists and arsonists was entangled.

As the truth was yet to come out through the legal process, the surviving Red Shirts demanded redress and accountability for such crimes against civilians. When the Red Shirt-supported government rose to power in 2011, it passed a law to grant

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[12] It is worth noting that Deves Insurance's biggest shareholder is the Crown Property Bureau with 87% of shares. The first court verdict was given during the Yingluck Shinawatra government, supported by the Red Shirts. The reversal of the case was ruled after her government was toppled by the coup makers, backed by the elite.

reparation to the people affected by political events from 2005 to 2010 with a maximum of 7.5 million baht (USD 220,000) redress, covering people from both political camps of the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts (EPPO, 2012). Chuan Leekpai, senior advisor to the Democrat Party, criticized the decision, arguing that Thaksin should be paying for his supporters (Red Shirts) instead of using people's tax money (Prachatai, 2012, February 7). Vorakorn Chatikavanij, the wife of the Democrat Party's Finance Minister commented with her Facebook status, which was set to the public privacy setting, "People who lost their income and lost their businesses during the protests commented that they had to pay taxes to support the protesters' reparation. That's hard to accept." She argued that the Red Shirt protests were "new and highly-paid business—the business of protest for Democracy" (Matichon Online, 2012, January 13). Still, these resentment and derogatory opinions on the Red Shirts reflected the assumption of the Red Shirts as beings without political agency. The rhetoric of terrorists and arsonists, being hired to stage havoc in the capital city, persists and exerts its force in the elite or the Democrats' minds. The contestation of truths and the visuals of resistance continue.

The killings are the first in the country's history of political struggle for democracy; however, the postcrackdown performances of resistance in public were possible because of people's creativity to evade the government and military suppression. They did not break the law that curbed a rally on the streets or political gatherings of more than five people. These actants mobilized the existing networked and small-group communication and translated the resistance into ceaseless possibilities.

When they could no longer organize rallies or speeches, or verbally address their political demands, they opted for wearing Red Shirts in public places. They got together

to chat over coffee at McDonald's, go shopping, do aerobic dance, bike, picnic, play dead on the street, make merit at the temple, and orally exchange stories of the past violence and trauma. The assemblages of these actants transformed the practices of resistance we used to see. The discussed performances to resist the official archive were manifesting in new and prolific forms to contest the official narrative that was constructed to justify the government's brutality. These performances held other acts of resistance and actants together, as some extended their strengths with more alliances at their own mediating points. All actants are irreducible. The strong actants such as Sombat Boonngamanong were able to muster alliances to aggregate the visuals of resistance in prolific forms. These allies, no matter how small or weak, proliferated the visuals of atrocities. The visuals of themselves, the public appearances, and their voices and stories cannot be reduced. These are actants that do things in the world. Altogether, they attempted to counter the visuals of themselves as menacing and rearticulate the label of terrorists. Not only did their performance on the streets reaffirm their existence and subjectivity, it also engaged others to witness and form opinions about their public performances. Their presence and bodily acts disrupted the flow of traffic, the pedestrians who continued to go shopping or go to the temple for Buddhist rites, and Thai society that assumed everyone was back to their normal routines, continuing business as usual. However, the disruption was made in instantaneous and fleeting forms, similar to the flash mob that dissipated shortly after their performances. These actants are nomads creating and moving as Deleuzian smooth space, reterrorializing and deterrorializing to escape being striated. When they moved, they created the tracing that marked the trajectory that is what Latour calls a network. Latour argues that these actants who mobilized to secure an

alliance will not stop acting on its own behalf. Rather, "they each carry on fomenting their own plots, forming their own groups, and serving other masters, wills, and functions" (Latour, 1988, p. 197).

The political turbulence continues. Questions of accountability still linger. No one was punished for the state killings. The Red Shirts' public performance of the past was an intervention and an undoing. These theatrical spectacles offer alternate truths through the visuals of their bodies and repetition, invoking new interpretation and understanding of the violent events committed by the state. More importantly, the rhizomes of resistance have taken root and flourished in assorted forms. They are active actants, creating lines of flight.

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CHAPTER 3

MEMES AS POLITICAL PARTICIATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

"The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms."
Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, p.245.

The Red Shirt-supported the Puea Thai Party to win the generation elections in July 2011. Thaksin Shinawatra's younger sister Yingluck Shinawatra rose to power and formed the coalition government. However, the tension and resentment towards Thaksin and his affiliation with the government through his sister was heightened when the government decided to enact the blanket amnesty bill for all people involved in political charges, including Thaksin Shinawatra, whom the city people and the ruling elite loathed, and the opposition Democrat party leaders, who orchestrated the fatal 2010 crackdown on the Red-Shirt protesters.

The blanket amnesty bill sparked outrage from both the city people as well as the Red Shirts who suffered from the 2010 crackdown. The resistance against this amnesty led to a series of protests on the streets, ranging from the antiamnesty sentiment to advocacy for fresh elections. Immediately before this surge of political rallies, the Anti-Maewong Dam Movement brought people back on the streets to protest against the government's plan to build this dam in Northern Thailand. Led by Sasin Chalermlarb, the

march against the dam turned out to be the prelude for the march against the Yingluck government's Amnesty Bill. People on social media adopted the picture of the "No Dam" as their profile pictures. This was later emulated by the Anti-Amnesty advocates, who adopted "No Amnesty Bill" to feature as their profile pictures. The antidam rallies on the street were the rehearsals for the group of People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), backed by the elite and the opposition Democrat Party. They identified with the tricolors of the Thai national flags. The PDRC protests successfully pressured Premier Yingluck Shinawatra to dissolve parliament on December 2, 2013 and call for snap elections, slated for February 2, 2014. But the PDRC's Shutdown Bangkok protests demanded Yingluck Shinawatra to step down and the Democrats refused to send candidates to run in the upcoming elections. The situation led to a political impasse, culminating in the military coup d'état on May 22, 2014. Army Chief Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha became the Prime Minister. At the time of writing, he is still in power with no elections on the horizon.

This new surge of political turmoil sparked an array of visuals of resistance. In addition to the tradition media and satellite channels that advocated certain political agendas, social media, particularly Facebook, was the site of struggle over political expressions from those who opposed and supported the Amnesty Bill. Thai people have never been more eager to engage in this form of political participation. At the time of the protests, the last quarter of 2013, there was a sharp increase in Thai social media users. In 2013, the number of Facebook users rose to 24 million, with over 5.5 billion messages sent each month. Bangkok was still one of the top cities in the world with the highest number of Facebook users or 26% of the Thai population (Kritsch, 2014). Now that

social media have become ubiquitous, the way Thai people communicate and subsequently participate in political debates has dramatically changed. The mainstream media no longer hold exclusive control over mass communication. People see themselves as active beings, agents and actants, capable of broadcasting and communicating their views from one to many, in other words, they recognize that they are not restricted to one-to-many communications. The social media network connects people to their friends and friends of friends' networks, creating a compression of time and space that exposes people to others thoughts, ideas, and cultural artifacts. The flux of information travels along lines of flight—assemblages, mediated by actants whose strength depends on the number of allies in their network.

The visuals of political activism featured both Anti-Amnesty or Anti-Yingluck government, as well as pro Yingluck factions. These visuals proliferated on the social media screens. Among them, memes proliferated in a rhizomatic manner. These memes juxtaposed political advocacy, visuals of people's bodies at rallies and events on the streets, citizens' interpretations, and co-creation of meanings.

Despite being widely debated in academia due to their questionable creditability and superficial nature of, memes carry cultural implications, manifesting people's attempts to engage in persuasion, interpretation of events, contestation and construction of truths, and cultural production. Memes, thriving along the rhizomatic network of social platforms, are a "valuable methodological tool" that is apt for analyzing discourses in popular culture, altering social practices despite their superficiality and triviality (Johnson, 2007, p. 28). This chapter neither deliberates the moral framework nor focuses on the bias of memes. Rather, following technology media theorists, I question how

technology introduces transformational possibilities into society. This chapter examines how technology transforms the possibilities for politics in Thailand, particularly during its tumultuous time when people are dramatically divided. As they are now living in a society where smart phones are deeply saturated with 125% penetration (Kritsch, 2014), communication technology plays a significant role in people's daily interactions and socialization. Political participation also changes from face-to-face conversations into self-broadcast capable spaces such as social media. Political messages and opinions seep into people's social media feeds, affecting people's engagement during this time of political transition. Political conversations and interactions transform into abridged versions or visual expressions, as short and seemingly trivial as memes. This chapter examines the way people communicate by means of memes, with acute attention to their rhetorical force in mobilizing for activism, producing meanings, contesting "truths," and cultural production.

Memes

The term memes or memetics was conceptualized for the first time in the 1970s. In *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins applies the scientific term to the way we look at culture. He argues that genetic transmission in nature is analogous to cultural transmission. According to Dawkins, the word meme is based on the Greek root, *mimeme*, meaning imitation. The term is shortened to one syllable to make it similar to gene and look like *même* or memory in French. It absorbs "a unit of cultural transmission" or "a unit of imitation" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 206) that includes cultural production such as "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or

of building arches" (p. 206). Memes are replicators that can propagate in the same manner as genes, jumping from brain to brain by way of imitation. If memes or ideas are preferable, they stick, stay and bourgeon in the cultural environment. Dawkins argues that the lifespan of a single copy of a meme does not matter as much as its multiplicities. Like genes, their significance lies in their repetition. For example, a song that spreads via the meme pool may be measured by how many people sing it. In essence, memes are ideas that survive by replication—moving from one body to another.

In the past, memes were analyzed in the use of language that gets adopted by people. On today's Internet, we see memes in their original as well as user-appropriated versions; they appear in assorted forms such as in humor and rumor as well as on websites or in videos (Shifman, 2013). In Dawkins' recent interview with *Wired* magazine, he explained that memes on the Internet are a "hijacking of the original idea and that instead of mutating by random change and spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, they are altered deliberately by human creativity" (Solon, 2013, para. 3). This differs from his original idea and meaning of meme in that the copying's accuracy does not matter as much as the intentional alteration. I argue that memes disrupt linear thoughts in language with the juxtaposition of visuals, fragments of soundbites, and visualizations of imagination, bundled together for easy transmission. Like genes, memes travel easily in the manner of gene transmission and survive by way of replication along rhizomatic networked communication. It is the transmission that is ongoing, a mutation or a becoming. Because of the rapid multiplication and transformation of memes, it is pivotal that we investigate what they do to forge the world we now live in.

Johnson (2007) argues that memes carry rhetorical materiality that can be a

productive concept when we examine contemporary culture. The rhetorical aspect of memes survives in people's minds, replicating by transforming into many other different versions during times of political crisis. Scholars in Internet research are fond of advocating for the Internet's potential to facilitate democracy by opening up space for people to engage in public debate. Oftentimes, they implement the Habermasian concept of the public sphere—a model that predicates rationality and ideal speech that renders consensus. Kendall R. Phillips (1996) cautions that such a model is flawed as it can exclude dissent and difference or ignore marginalized populations. In an age when we are surrounded by multiple screens ranging from advertising billboards to portable devices, DeLuca, Sun and Peeples (2011) suggest that we move beyond the public sphere to public screens, which provide avenues for social activism, and political participation: "Public screens highlight dissemination, images, hypermediacy, spectacular publicity, cacophony, immersion, distraction, and dissent" (DeLuca et al. 2011, p. 144). Through these means, activists can critique via spectacle, not critique versus spectacle (DeLuca et al., 2011). I argue memes pertinently add to the way we engage communication in social media. Not restricted to just a few people in a village, memes posted on social media carry the potential of communicating nationally or globally. The events that take place on the streets can be made into memes that advocate or negate what the events embody. They travel, not from one core or in a centralized manner. Instead, they move along the rhizomatic lines that can be connected by knots of people in their network. These are decentered knots, connected together in the network, moving in multiplicities. This makes it hard to control or drone-kill any core leader or center because no center is apparent. Netizens "converse" and engage in political expressions by creating, replicating

and appropriating the memes they see on their "walls." The information in memes is fragmented and packaged to move in nimble units, attracting people's eyes as they move, taking root in people's minds, tinkering with their decisions.

Rhetorical Force of Memes

Communication media are central to knowledge distribution over time and space (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 2001). Different media technology does not exert equal influence on society or social organization. In Western culture, the technology of writing changed oral societies once people internalized the system of writing that fixes words in space. This system expanded the potential of language and led to advancements in philosophy, science, and arts (Ong, 2002). At the same time, because writing facilitates control over space, it centralizes the power of ruling institutions.

In memes, orality and written forms intersect. Memes comprise the oral tradition of what people speak, and along with other visual images, are made into new visual images, appropriated to be seen and shared. Sturken clarifies that it is not uncommon to look at visual culture as a combination of written words, speech, language, images or other forms of representation or experience. In discourses as wide-ranging as art history and advertising, visual culture is repeatedly organized with different elements that invite looking (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).

Despite the various technological options available to people in the 21st century (telephone, television, the Internet), a number of features in oral culture are still tangible and mediated through these media (Ong, 2002). When words are spoken, they can be made into objects. In other words, speech becomes the content of print. McLuhan's

remarkable phase, the medium is the message, is most relevant in the case of memes. Photographs, pictures, words or video clips are appropriated into another entity—a meme that counts more than the contents themselves. The production of memes includes multiplicities of voices and forms, created or reappropriated by a number of different people whose identities are not highlighted or privileged. According to Johnson (2007), people's agency is not the focus of the visual but the discursive elements of the visual that work in the same manner as in the debate about discourse and power.

The example of the rhetorical force of memes can be seen in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) incident at the University of California Davis. The police officer used pepper spray on student protests sitting on the sidewalk on campus. The incident sparked a series of memes with this police officer, who then earned the new title of The Pepper Spraying Cop and Casually Spray Everything Cop, photoshopped to appear in prominent paintings (see Figure 3.1). This meme went viral on the Internet and was featured on mainstream media including *The New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, Wired*, among others. The meme-ification "marked the moment when the Occupy movement expanded its purview: It moved beyond its concern with economic justice to espouse, simply, justice" (Garber, 2011, para. 6). The memes not only critiqued the police's action, but also directed people's attention to the OWS movement.

In other words, memes are materials that do not represent things, but rather are things. These memes asked us to engage (Johnson, 2007). When memes are created, seen, posted and shared, they provoke responses from those who are exposed to the visual. They want people to talk about them. Memes can be the objects that we look at; they can be the subjects that direct us to the ways we should think about them.

Figure 3.1 Occupy Wall Street Meme: Lt. Pike was featured in Georges Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (Picture: http://knowyourmeme.com)

Memes in the Networked Sphere

Economic competition influences many different aspects of social institutions. People compete for communication technology as part of their economic struggle (Innis, 1951). In the global economy in the information age, after the economic activities centered on information have become prevalent, Yochai Benkler (2006) posits that non-market/social production is likely to emerge and play a more prominent role. The latter paves the way for new patterns of social organization, shaping an array of associations among people. These social relations are people's motivation for information exchange. These factors forge a new communication ecology with decentralized individuals (Benkler, 2006). When the way we communicate changes, it can lead to social change

(Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1964/2001; Shirky, 2008).

Thailand's mainstream media landscape is very centralized, with Bangkok residents' issues high on the agenda. Bangkok is not only the capital of Thailand but, according to some, is Thailand (McCargo, 2000). Local newspapers or television stations are rare and do not have substantial subscription or impact.[1] While private corporations own the newspapers, the government and the military had exclusively owned the broadcast media of radio and television stations. These owners sold the concessions for private companies to operate. The exception lies in the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (ThaiPBS), funded by excise taxes at USD66 million/year. The latest change in broadcast television ownership, which occurred in January 2014, allowed for an addition of 24 digital terrestrial commercial channels to be operated by private companies (Thongtep, 2014). As in Western culture, the centralization of mainstream media can lead to control in the construction of meaning in the public's mind (Castells, 2012; McChesney, 1999). Other alternative media, such as satellite and cable television, have burgeoned. These outlets have been used primarily for entertainment or home shopping. Only a few offer news that caters to specific political preferences. For example, the new satellite station owned by the Democrat Party, Blue Sky TV, broadcasts live anti-government protests.

The technology of print and electronic media such as radio and television facilitates the preservation of accuracy in messages while traveling across great distances,

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[1] The local community radio stations are popularly enjoyed by the grassroots population, including street vendors and taxi drivers in the capital city. Radio hosts of these stations are linked with online communities. The contents from online communities are also recounted on these community radio stations. Community radio is pivotal to the Red Shirts' mobilization as seen in their previous mass rallies in 2009 and 2010. However, due to the nature of the radio medium, the display of the reactions of individuals is either limited or not as visible.

allowing rulers to maintain power and ideology (Innis, 1951). With online technology, we see multiplicities of information. Now mobile phone penetration in Thailand has reached more than 100% of the population with half of all cell phone users owning smartphones (Sultana, 2013). Accessing the Internet via their smartphones has become more prevalent where lower-cost data plans decrease barriers to entry. Now people can amplify their voices through "shares" and "retweets" at little or no cost. Some popular Facebook fan pages or particular interests have over a quarter-million members—equal to the circulation of Thailand's most popular newspaper, *Thairath*.

In addition, another distinctive change in people's organized association is evident in Facebook's structure, which connects people via rhizomes and assemblages. Although we tend to see less, if any, physical underground rhizomatic "wires" as wireless Internet connection becomes prevalent, the architecture of the Internet still holds the characteristics of rhizomes, with nodal points connecting to other nodes. This pattern also aligns with what Deleuze and Guattari posit as an ontological view of the world—assemblages of heterogeneous elements. Rather than being connected in a hierarchical structure of trees, things can grow and expand horizontally (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). All of these are made possible by modern technology and tech savvy actors who know how to organize and mobilize online crowds online (Shirky, 2008).

The Internet's interconnectedness can also be seen as networks of alliances. For Latour, the network consists of actants, which include everything—living and nonliving beings locked in varying strengths, determined by associations (Latour, 2005). Facebook users and memes are actants that may gain or lose their strength depending on the number of ties they are connected to. Internet users and memes can both be actants, with more

strength if the knots hold more ties. To accumulate these ties or to build alliances online now requires much less capital, time, and effort (Benkler, 2006). The options to drum up support by creating "groups" or "communities" online can be, as Shirky notes, "ridiculously easy" (2008, p. 54). Shirky points out that advancements in technology provide simple ways to form groups that lead to more groups and multiple kinds of groups. Collective efforts, such as finding organizing protests, can be possible when individuals are motivated to participate. The ease of organizing, coordinating, and contributing to a cause—without hierarchical management—forges news ways of coordination and gives rise to collaborations and new forms of accomplishments. One outstanding example is Kickstarter, the website that connects artists and people to fund creative ideas and projects. Since 2009, about 7 million people have pledged USD 1 billion dollars to fund 68,000 projects. Stephen Heleker who received $21,000 for his short film project commented that the site is "the most democratic way art has ever been made" (Kickstarter, 2014).

However, what can be accomplished collectively by netizens without formal institutions does not necessarily always lend itself to progressive or democratic goals. McChesney (1999) warns that the Internet might curtail democracy when business conglomerates have control over political opinions. In *The Net Delusion,* Evegeny Morozov (2011) also argues against the cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism that sees the Internet as a tool for democracy. He explains this by directing our attention toward the use of the Internet to surveil. With the aid of technology, the government can monitor our online activities more easily and less expensively. This has been made more evident in light of the recent National Security Agency (NSA) revelations. In the summer of

2013, Glenn Greenwald broke the story of Edward Snowden, who exposed the US government's mass surveillance through major cellphone providers and Internet companies in the United States (Greenwald, 2013). In 2014, tech corporations such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Yahoo publicly admitted that they comply with the NSA's Prism program's requests for users' data (Ackerman & Rushe, 2014). Under the Prism program, the NSA can acquire information on any user without a court order.

Beyond the debate surrounding the binary of Internet space and how it pertains to democracy and freedom, in this chapter I investigate the characteristics that enable the Internet to offer an environment that forges differing kinds of communication. In this ecology, the Internet's attribute as a networked space carries a spatial bias, allowing for messages' mobility to travel over great distances. Messages and contents can be shared with people living on the opposite side of the world given that they are connected within this network. An example of this can be seen in global collaborations such as *Wikipedia*, made possible by this spatial bias of the Internet medium. At the same time, Internet communication also carries a tricky temporal bias that can allow messages to be fleeting as well as permanent. Since we have options to delete the contents we post, a message's life span depends on our control and the Internet's hosting services. However, our messages can also become permanent or extend into realms of existence beyond our control of its existence. Someone can capture a screenshot, for example, and appropriate it into a meme to be shared.

In these networked spaces, memes are cultural productions that are made more effective with the visual aspect that invites looking. The visual aspect adds the possibility of being adopted so as to thrive in the manner of rhizomes—a subterranean stem,

including bulbs and tubers, rats, burrows that engender and expand horizontally. Each meme can establish connections or appropriations between "semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.7). Their movements are made possible by the actions of clicking "like" and "share" in a network of "friends" who are connected to their friends. What the rhizomatic structure entails are decentralized yet autonomous nodes of people who can introduce memes, participate in replicating them, and exit the space at any point. McLuhan (1964/2001) argued that communication media such as television changed people's organization of experience. This rhizomatic media ecology changes people's experience in engaging and perceiving the world. Transformative interactivity and participatory opportunities are made possible in this networked structure. Thai people have spaces to express their views and amplify their voices through these horizontal connecting contacts. Memes fit this ecology with the mobility to travel along these lines in the structure, producing different meanings to events, persuading people to engage in activism, and challenging people's perception of truths.

Memes That Advocate for Political Actions

Perception is always culturally and socially conditioned instead of natural. Today, methods of communication have evolved into more fragmented and shorter messages, and netizens can easily be distracted by an excessive amount of information on their social network feeds. From billboard advertising to online media, abbreviated versions of messages are encouraged and adopted, truncated as short as text messages, or 140 character limits on Twitter. New technologies, such as the search engines that

instantly direct us to what we want, also affect our sensory experience. Nicholas Carr (2008) has explained that Google remaps the way we think by refining algorithms that designate how we find information and extract meaning from it. It is not surprising that we now find it hard to focus on a book after reading a few pages (Carr, 2008). Many of us who interact daily with the online world prefer succinct forms of messages. Memes fit into this changing pattern of communication and help us cope with the vast amount of information we consume. Memes are concise and mobile, making it easy to for them to travel along lines of flight. They disrupt linear thoughts by presenting visual messages that invite us to look. The rhetorical force of this visual can persuade people to engage in activism in the same way that advertisements or banners influence us (DeLuca et al., 2011).

During the height of political dissent in Thailand, a particular political meme was fervently adopted and reappropriated. In November 2013, the "Stop Blanket Amnesty Bill " went viral in social media and partially contributed to offline street protests. The meme is made up of a simple black square with white text that reads, "No Amnesty" (see Figure 3.2 and 3.3). Not only was the meme shared extensively among social media "friends," it was also adopted as people's profile pictures. The meme's strong discursive force of resisting amnesty prompted people to replicate and spread it virally. The massive display of this meme subsequently led to offline protests as well as other satirical and humorous versions of the meme, for example, "Stop Going to Work on Monday," "Stop AV Censorship," "Stop Banning Porn," and "Stop Using Push-up Bras," among others.

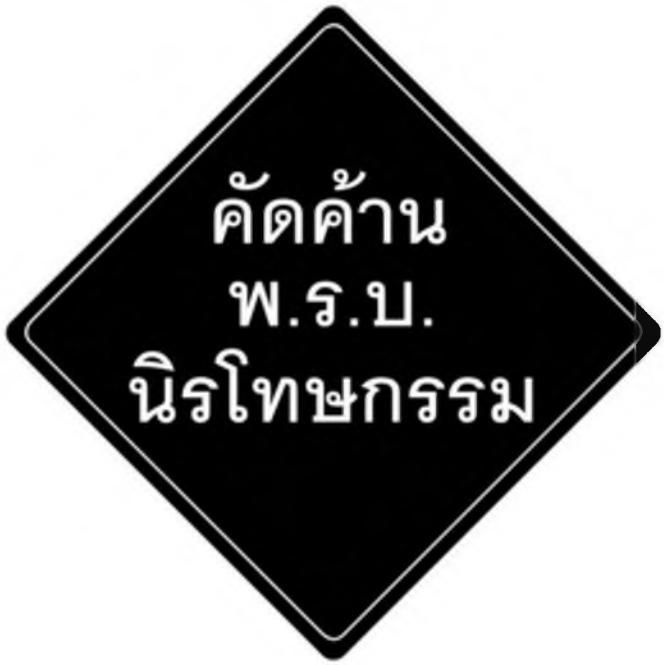

Figure: 3.2 Kad Karn Por Ror Bor Niratodasakam (No Amnesty)

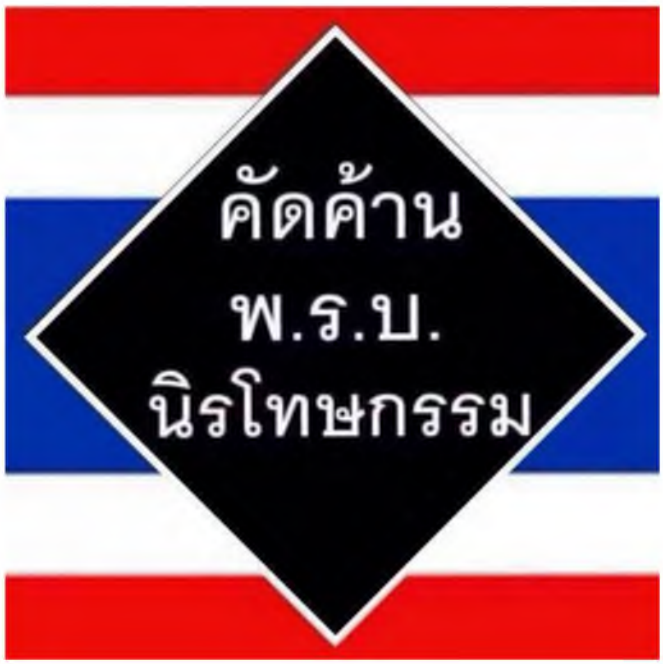

Figure 3.3 A variation of the meme

The strong resentment against the Blanket Amnesty Bill derived from Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's[2] government's decision to propose the bill at the strange hour of 3 a.m. on November 1, 2013 (Thairath Online, 2013, November 2). It was the bill that would grant amnesty for all past alleged lawbreakers with political charges against them. These included the leaders of both political poles. Premier Yingluck Shinawatra's brother and Red Shirt-supported Thaksin would be pardoned for the graft charges. Meanwhile, the palace-supported Democrats would also be pardoned for orchestrating the violent crackdown on the Red-Shirts that killed more than 90 people in 2010.[3] For the first time in a decade, Thais who supported two different political poles agreed on the same thing—their opposition to this bill.

Memes were the first visible expression of opposition against the bill. They rapidly proliferated in social media feeds. Like rhizomes, they were adopted and merged with other elements as they blossomed. Modifiers to show shared identities were embraced. These modifiers showed collective identities of educational institutions, professions, or geographical locations. After a while, the memes did not entail coherence, despite carrying a general message against the blanket amnesty. The memes took on

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[2] Yingluck Shinawatra dissolved Parliament on December 2, 2013 and called for fresh elections. She remained the caretaker prime minister until a new government could be formed. However, the results of the general elections on February 2, 2014 could not be announced or concluded because the PDRC protesters obstructed the people from casting their votes. While being Caretaker Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra was toppled by the coup d'état in May 2014. Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha rose to power. The country has been under military rule since.

[3] The first group is often identified as the Red Shirt United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), made up of grassroots, anti-coup advocates and staunch supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra. The other group is associated with promonarchy, urban-elite supporters who once sided with the Yellow Shirt People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). The latter became the PDRC, which staged protests to demand the Prime Minister step down and refuse to support fresh elections. The PDRC adopted the colors of national flag: red, white and blue, along with whistles as symbols of their movement.

agencies of their own as they met new audiences who reformulated the broader message. The masses appropriated their own versions with words showing distinctive causes. For the group that opposed the violent crackdown in 2010 that killed over 90 people, the meme in Figure 3.4 proclaimed, "No amnesty because murderers in the Flashy City must be punished" (*Yumuangdajaritcheewittongpop* (in Thai) Living in the flashy city, life must be popular, 2013). Other examples include "No amnesty. Murderers must be imprisoned. People must be freed" (Chronomist, 2013, November 4). More importantly, another meme critiques people's replication of this amnesty. It proposes six different nuances: 1) No amnesty for murderers and leaders who killed people; 2) No amnesty for Thaksin; 3) No Amnesty for Thaksin; He must be tried; 4) Amnesty must include those charged with Article 112 cases;[4] 5) No amnesty for Red-Shirts who set the city ablaze; 6) No amnesty for we hate politicians. The meme also accommodates people to adopt these versions by providing links to download different online sizes of the memes (iLaw,

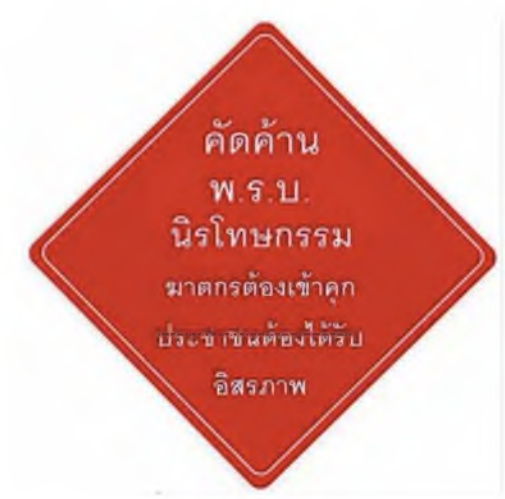

Figure 3.4 The meme reads, "No amnesty because murderers in the Flashy City must be punished"

[4] Article 112 is the century-old *Lese Majeste* law that prohibits Thai people from criticizing the King, Queen, and Crown Prince of Thailand. Violation entails a 3- to 15-year imprisonment.

2013).

Such a display of antagonism quickly transferred to discussions about protests. In less than a week after the amnesty bill was passed, on November 6, 2013, the word "protests" topped online media on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, webboards, and blogs. Twitter had the most mentions at 800,000. On pantip.com, the most popular webboard, the word was mentioned in more than 6,000 topics with about 200,000 comments (Pongvitayapanu, 2013). The protests against this bill were then organized and mobilized online before transferring to actions on the streets. The PDRC leader claimed over 6 million people joined the mass rallies in December 2013 (ThaiPBS, 2013). The engagement of the Thai people, particularly the middle class and elites in Bangkok, were fervent on both terrains. Deleuze and Guattari posit the ontology of rhizomes that can merge with other things such as the wind or people and transform when expanding its territory. In this case, the meme persuaded people to adopt its force, to engage in rallying against this bill. The memes were territorialized, thriving along with comments from people exchanging their views and oftentimes making arrangements to meet at protest sites.

With the memes expanding their terrains, the visual display of advocacy sent a rhetorical message that persuaded more people to join their movement. On Facebook, differing views or information travel along the lines of what Mark Granovetter (1973) calls weak ties. Friends in one's network represent weak ties that aptly serve as a fertile ground for meme diffusion. In addition, at this point in time, the protests on the streets were seen as low-risk participation—the festive rather than the risky violent-prone event. Protest sites were primarily the easily accessible downtown shopping malls. More memes

of Anti-Amnesty with bodies in the visual—"selfies"—were posted, displaying people adorned with the PDRC protest props, including whistles, ribbons, and hairbands of red, white and blue, the colors of the Thai flag. These new memes burgeoned by online "shares" and "likes" took over Thai netizens' Facebook walls. The city people's Facebook walls were almost completely territorialized by such displays of opposition.

I do not argue that the meme alone mobilized such immense opposition to the amnesty bill, for the PDRC protests were organized by groups with leaders. The issue of amnesty itself was highly problematic. However, the display of the Anti-Amnesty memes carried the rhetorical force of resistance and magnified the issue. New memes of protest participation were posted in the online sphere to be replicated and adopted. Such proliferation broadcasted the magnitude of resistance back to the government. Only a week after the bill was passed, Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra appeared on a special television broadcast to tell the public that the bill had been revoked. She clarified that the bill was drafted to grant amnesty to political prisoners and people who suffered from the legal ramifications of the 2006 coup d'état (Thairath Online, 2013, November 7). The phenomenon pressured the Premier to respond to their calls. She eventually announced the dissolution of Parliament and called for general elections, slated for February 2, 2014 (Thairath Online, 2013, December 9).

Memes and the Production of Political Meanings

Memes invite looking in a way that is similar to photographs. Since the Internet is not situated in isolation, oftentimes what we see in memes is an assemblage of things that happen offline, uploaded to make them visible online. Memes can be produced to define

new meanings in response to current events or can be appropriated in defiance of existing meanings. The characteristics of the Internet that enable people to access and send their messages anywhere allow for rupture. The barriers to entry into the communication model of one-to-many are displaced with social media. Knowledge production is no longer exclusively restricted to certain institutions or a select few individuals. Benkler (2006) has illustrated this shift in his discussion of the rise of *Wikipedia*, where people collaboratively construct a pool of knowledge online. *Wikipedia* is built on a model that allows existing knowledge to be challenged or redefined. Anyone can contribute and participate in the construction of meanings in the online space that is open to the public.

Similarly, memes are collaborative efforts. They are created like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes, which form and re-form when the bulbs meet new elements, take root, and territorialize. Memes, specifically those seen in the case of Thailand's social media screens, embody words and actions, offline and online. Political participation is not limited to debates on television or in newspapers, but can be visible in the form of memes, created by anyone who wants to advocate or interpret political events. Memes can carry strong characteristics of oral culture—spoken words—in the form of comments made offline or on other media outlets, including status updates on Facebook. Historically, to record sound, we adopted the alphabet system. Now with digital evolution, sound bites or words can be merged and juxtaposed with the visual, made to easily travel along the lines of people's social networks. They are uploaded, ready to be launched or replicated. Scholars such as Innis and McLuhan argue that print culture can centralize hegemonic views and strengthen nationalism. The structure of networked spaces makes room for lines of flight, accommodating differing constructions of

meanings to flourish. In this process, political views and comments from various sources, from prominent scholars to the anonymous, can be curated or created in the form of memes that travel within the network.

The mobility and democracy of memes can be seen in the example of the online wiki-style *Dictionary of the Contemporary Thai Politics*: *The Thai Politictionary*. This Facebook page features definitions and explanations of emerging political conditions, groups, and events. Although curated solely by the administrator of the page, these definitions derive from various sources. For example, the definition of the word *Thai Choey*, or Passive Thai, was coined by the antigovernment People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) protesters (Thai Politictionary, 2013, December 21). These protesters urged people not to be Passive *Thai Choey*, but to be decisive about their political stance, encouraging others to join their movement. The word was countered by the new discourse *Thai Od Ton,* or the Tolerant Thai, referring to those who express tolerance towards the current turmoil caused by the PDRC. The word *Thai Od Ton* came from Verapat Pariyawong, a political commentator who coined the word and posted it as a Facebook status update. It was later adopted as a Facebook page, *ThaiTolerate*, to persuade people to exercise tolerance in the political crisis. The word has been featured in the form of a meme on the *Politictionary* page. It was also adopted by the online news website, manager.co.th, which supports the antidemocratic movement (ASTVManager, 2013). The word *Thai Od Ton* became a meme, presenting the counter-stance to the Passive Thai. This meme's rhetorical force was to persuade people to adhere to tolerance in solving political disagreements by democratic rules. It persuades people to diverge from hatred, violence, or unconstitutional means. Verapat also advocated for this word

himself when interviewed by television stations, affirming this alternative gesture towards political participation. Despite only a small number of Facebook page members (25,000), the word was made into five different versions of memes or badges for people to adopt as their Facebook profile pictures (Pantip Webboard, 2013, December 7), and was eventually widely adopted in mainstream media and used in political conversation, including the most popular *Thairath* newspaper (Thairath Online, 2013, December 11), the online news website *MThai.com* (MThai, 2013, December 7), and a political talk show "Diva's Café" (Voice TV, 2013, December 11).

Another attempt to define and explain political events comes from offline symbolic actions that are transformed into memes. On January 26, 2014, Pijarinee Ratanachumnong was obstructed by the monarchy-supported PDRC protesters from going to cast her vote in advance at the polling station in Chatuchak District of Bangkok (Thairath, 2014, January 27). She was stopped and harassed by a protester who pulled her arm until she staggered. Another protester wrapped the national flag around her head and pulled her back. She persisted in moving forward until she could not. Then she grabbed a red torchlight in her purse and raised it into the air while standing still—as if she was shedding light on the protesters' actions that impeded the democratic process of elections. The event was captured on cell phones and cameras, and posted on Facebook. Pijarinee's resistance was turned into a meme and circulated on social media within a few hours. Her action was taken as an image event that attracted the people's attention online and later on mainstream media. On social media, people captured her image, juxtaposed it with the Statue of Liberty, and made it into a meme. While the meme was shared, it rhizomatically forged another element with the title, *Taepeesereepa*, meaning Aunty Liberty. On the

most popular webboard, *pantip.com*, people were looking for her memes while others responded with new versions (see Figure 3.5). The image event that Pijarinee created to express her intention to go to vote in advance was collectively given more meanings. People equated her action with a symbol of resistance and liberty. Even more versions followed, one of which called her *Super Pa!* (Super Aunt!) Other people replicated her gesture and posted their own photos on Facebook to show support for her resistance (see Figure 3.6). Some juxtaposed her picture with the text, "The Democrats' mob is afraid of The elections. Their fear is far more than the ghosts' fear for sunlight"—a visual critique of the Democrat-backed PDRC movement (see Figure 3.6). Her pose was also made into other memes, for example, the "Guidelines to Go to Vote" (see Figure 3.7). It suggests that people "cosplay," or emulate her by wearing a white top and pink pants, and carrying a torch when going to cast their votes (Assembly for the Defense of Democracy, 2014). Other versions emphasized the people's strong will to exercise their right to vote.

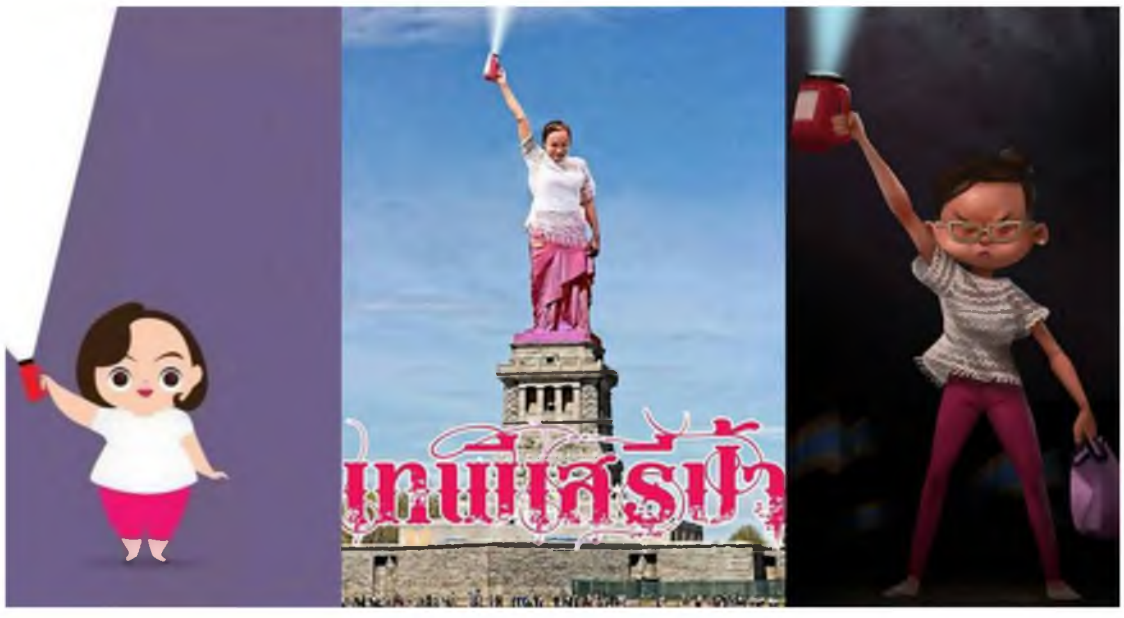

Figure 3.5 The Aunty Liberty memes, advocating for people go to vote despite being hindered by the PDRC protesters.

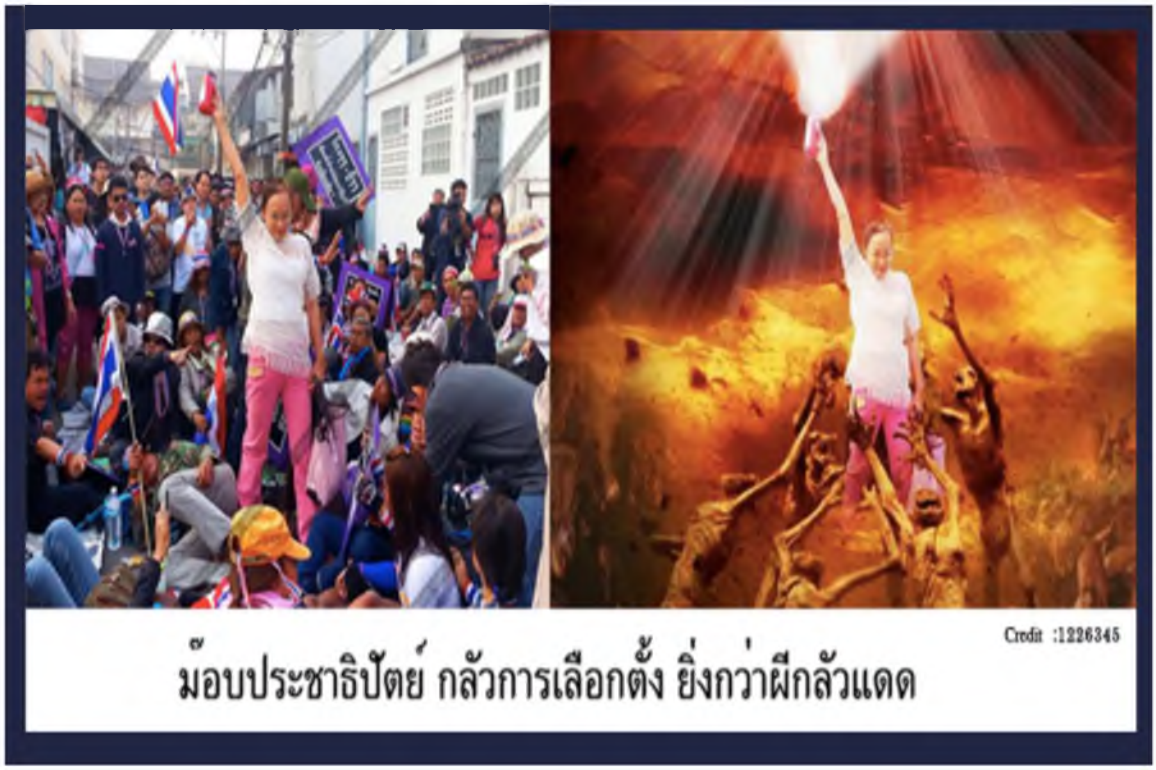

Figure 3.6 The meme is appropriated for political expressions. It reads, "The Democrats' mob is afraid of the elections. Their fear is far more than the ghosts' fear for sunlight."

In these cases, the producers of the memes did not matter as much as what their memes convey. Anyone can be an actant who takes ownership in defining, interpreting, and advocating for political actions, rather than waiting to hear from the media or experts. The horizontal structure allows for collective participation in constructing and producing meanings, explanations, and implications of political events.

Mainstream media also featured her resistance, for example, on the front page of *Thairath* (Thairath, 2014, January 27), Kom Chud Leuk political talk show (Kom Chud Leuk YouTube Channel, 2014, January 27), and the online news website *Prachatai* (Lumubon, 2014). In one of her interviews, Pijarinee explained that her torchlight symbolically meant to shed light on the country's political impasse. "I hope the light

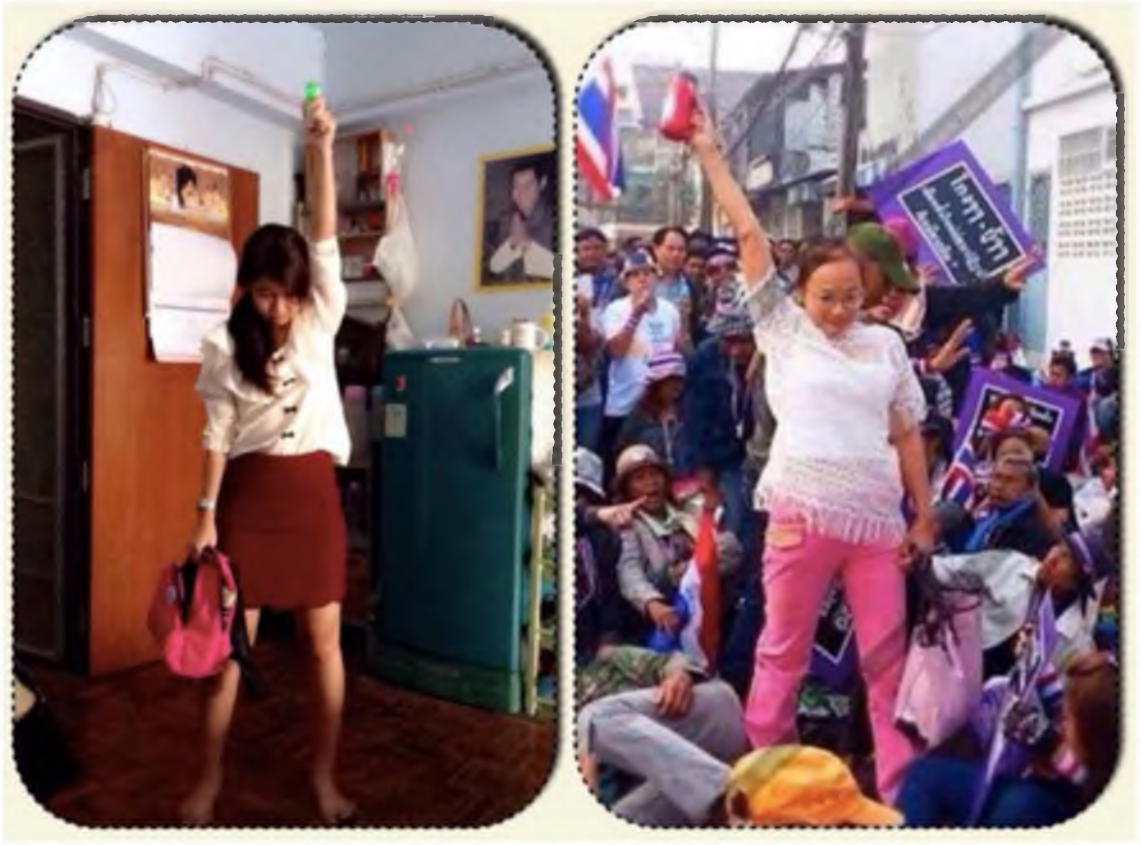

Figure 3.7 The meme is replicated by netizens in support of what they define as resistance to undemocratic action.

would prompt these protesters to reflect on their actions that obstruct others' right to vote," (Kom Chud Leuk YouTube Channel, 2014). She added that, in the past, the media would ask no more than 10 experts for political comments but never really asked ordinary people who could only express their views among themselves. She added, "Our comments are always gone with the wind." Today, Pijarinee's action continues to be seen. Her voice is not only heard, but also amplified by the memes and the "share" function of social media. Her event morphed into other different versions of memes to be circulated. It encouraged people not give in despite being stopped by these protesters—a statement to resist the movement that opposes the general elections.

In these cases, the producers of the memes did not matter as much as what these

memes convey. Anyone can be actants who take ownership in defining, interpreting, and advocating for political actions, rather than waiting to hear from the media or experts. The horizontal structure allows for collective participation in constructing and producing meanings, explanations and implications of political events that took place.

The Struggle Over Truths in Memes

McLuhan, along with others, argued that media are reality framers. He explained that the invention of printing, for example, shaped the way we think in straight lines, causing us to manipulate things in a manner that is convenient to the visual. Print culture established the epistemology that seeing is believing—a notion that people still hold onto when it comes to the pursuit of truths. Our perception of truth based solely on "seeing" is now challenged more often because digital technology allows for easy alterations and appropriations of what we see as truths. Lowe (1982) posited in the *History of Perception* that our hierarchy of senses changed over time. Lowe argues that people in the Middle Ages relied more on hearing and touching, but now in the modern West, they privilege seeing over the other senses. In the age of the Internet and social media, the users' experience mediates their trust and affects their perceptions of truth. The Pew Research Internet Project reports that Internet users who spend more time online are more likely to trust others (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Our online experience often encourages multitasking; therefore, our ability to focus diminishes (Jackson, 2009). As a consequence, we tend to look for heuristic cues and turn to cognitive processes that are less organized to help us navigate the immense amount of information (Sundar, 2008; Wirth, Bocking, Karnowski, & von Pape, 2007). When people decide to follow or

subscribe to certain people or Facebook pages that they trust, they tend to lower their skepticism. During times of political turmoil, people have a tendency to believe what they see from the sources or people with whom they share the same political views. This is because if information is in line with one's ideology, it is more likely that one will find it credible (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). Therefore, people oftentimes pick up on these heuristic cues, adopt what they see in memes, and quickly share them.

However, memes that are curated and created by people online carry multiple truths. Alternately, they can be appropriated in such a way that can simulate truths, similar to the way photography, literature, film and television carry "truths." Sontag (1982) cautioned that despite being acknowledged as "evidence" or records of what has happened, the visual in photographs is the interpretation of the world in the same manner as paintings. With the advancement of technology, the lines between facts and fiction in the media are blurred. Baudrillard (1994) suggested that symbols or sets of signifiers could be created to represent something that might not exist, but is perceived as real—the hyperreal.

In the pursuit of truths, viewers interpret, adopt, or question these memes and the truths they embody. In such struggles, memes can involve collective actions. One example of memes discussed in the social media world was the substance used in dispersing protesters. During the clashes between the urban elite Thai protesters and the Thai police on December 1, 2013, people were sharing the captured status update of the Rubber Planters Update with more than 60,000 fans (Rubber Planters Update, 2013).[5] The page reported that the tear gas police fired was "not the tear gas but the gas that

[5] It is a Facebook Page that posts update on rubber planters' mobilizations when the prices of rubber plummet. Rubber is Southern Thailand's main agricultural product. It is also the stronghold of the Democrat Party, the members of which lead the antigovernment protests.

Hitler used to kill the Jews. The gas is purple. It's noticeable. If it's tear gas, you will be in tears but today it doesn't cause tears." Despite a lack of verification, it was made into a meme and quickly shared. Another meme featuring a photo of an arm with traces of purple and red was posted on the Rural Doctors Club Facebook Page. The meme asked people to identify what the purple substance in the water was so they could best treat the protesters (The Rural Doctors Club, 2013, December 2). It was "liked" and "shared" by tens of thousands of people (see Figure 3.8). It provoked anger against the government, particularly by the antigovernment protesters who hold the same political ideology as these two sources. Another related meme that prompted intense anger against the government and the police was from The People's Army to Topple Thaksin Facebook Page. The meme condemned the government for spraying a chemical called Dihydrogen monoxide heptahydrate (H2O) 7H2O onto the protesters, and said it caused irritation so severe that some had to be hospitalized (see Figure 3.9). It questioned, "How could the authorities use this chemical to curb protesters? The UNESCO announced a ban on this substance to suppress rallies. The government is utterly stupid" (The People's Army to Topple Thaksin, 2013). The "truth" this meme embodies did not go unquestioned. It directed people to discuss on the webboard pantip.com, where collaborative efforts in seeking the truth unfolded. Internet users with science knowledge argued that the name of the chemical was the fancy term for water, and that the meme was a hoax put out on the Internet to satirize people who do not know about chemistry, yet would jump into banning the substance.

On the webboard, one netizen posted a captured screenshot of a message posted by the Vice President of one Thai university, who holds a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry.

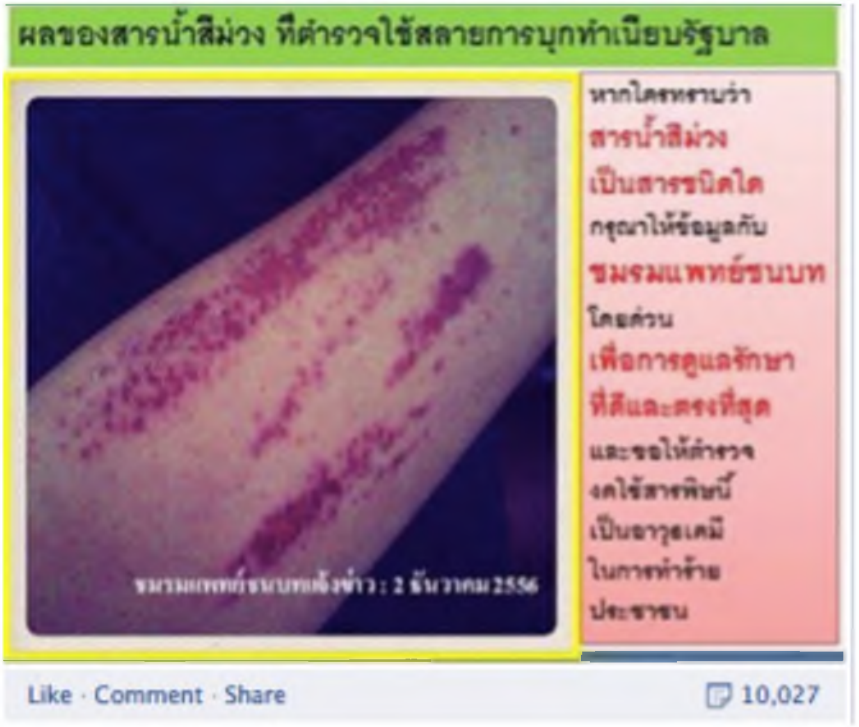

Figure 3.8 The traces of the purple substance on one of the protester's arms.

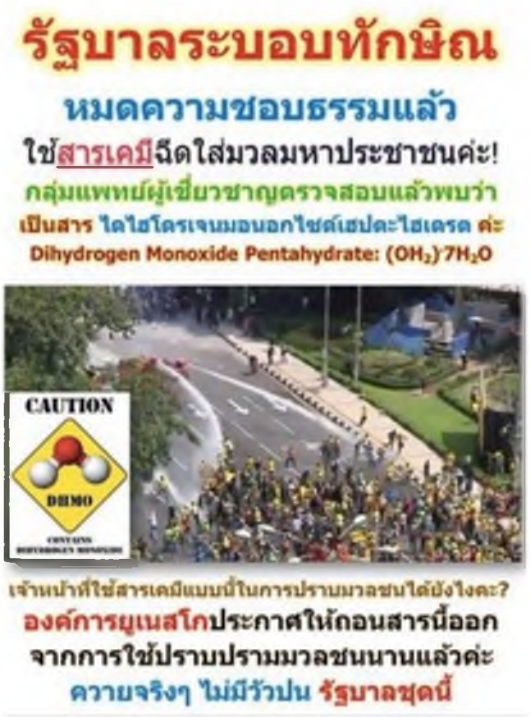

Figure 3.9 The meme claims the "truth," propagating that the government sprayed the chemical to disperse protesters. "Experts identified it as Dihydrogen Monoxide Pentahydrate," which turns out to be a fancy name for water.

He shared this meme with his added comment, "High pressure water is enough to disperse them. Why did they (the government) have to use chemical? The person who instructed this is evil." When asked if the substance was eight molecules of water, he argued that carbon monoxide was toxic and could cause hydroxylic acid. It was a vigorous discussion on the investigation of this substance, with links to Wikipedia and other webpages. In the collective effort to seek the truth, netizens also questioned whether the man was really a university professor. Some expressed sympathy toward his misstep in rushing to share the meme without verification. Meanwhile, others called for a check on the bias that debilitates people's ability to distinguish fact from fiction. Once a meme is posted, discussed, and territorialized along the rhizomes of social media, it can be unpredictable. Although the Vice President tried to delete his post to deterritorialize his comment and the reaction attached to this meme, it was impossible for him to do so, as those who were drawn to the story had captured and reposted his post, and engaged in discussing it in territories beyond his control.

Mainstream newspaper *Bangkok Business* joined the efforts of pursuing the truth behind the meme. It reported that the purple substance in water used to disperse protesters was magnesium permanganate, mixed with sodium thiosalphate, which helped with the spray of the water (see Figure 3.10). It could cause irritation to the skin and the color might stick to people's clothes for identification. The report confirmed it was not tear gas mixed with water, nor was it a "biological weapon" (Bangkok Biz News, 2013).

Like pollen, memes travel by enticing actors to replicate or take them elsewhere in the network. These memes play with an ontology deeply rooted in the visual. They attract people with their look, messages, and number of "likes," including the display of

Figure 3.10 Mainstream newspaper joined the pursuit of truth.

actants or those who post and replicate them. Memes reverse the position from objects to subjects that direct us to believe or question what we see. Then, they might vanish and never be talked about again. Alternately, they might gain strength as people literally capture them and adopt them in other territories, putting them on permanent display.

Memes to Participate and to Entertain

At the height of the political tension in late 2013, there emerged the fervent participation in the production of memes of Transport Minister Chadchart Sittipunt in Yingluck Shinawatra's government. While the pro-elite crowds were ready to march on the streets in their Shutdown Bangkok rallies, netizens were equally adamant in making memes. This creative engagement of Chadchart memes was an Internet phenomenon. The memes featured him in countless avatars of superheroes, juxtaposed with every possible situation and location. People's admiration for Chadchart was

remarkable in the midst of political turbulence and antagonism against the government. Surprisingly, he was admired by both political camps. This popularity burgeoned organically and virally—success that many political campaigners wish they could replicate. Over half a million people followed his page. He topped Thailand's Google Trends for male celebrities in 2014 (Google Trends, 2014). Chadchart's photo generated ceaseless participation in the backdrop of the political crisis. The participation in adopting and proliferating more memes reterritorialized the terrain of digital culture and entertainment to merge with politics. While generating creative ideas and laughter, people advocated for Chadchart. Despite being as trivial as a superhero in memes, animation or music videos or re-enactments of him in different settings, people endorsed Chadchart as the politician they admired. The visuals of these memes depicted the imaginary end to political impasse and a nodal point for Chardchart to articulate his political views.

The photo, which initiated multiplicities of memes, featured him in a black sports outfit carrying a meal for merit making, walking barefoot at a temple in the Northeastern province of Thailand (see Figure 3.11). This photo was taken by his fan and shared with the Facebook Fanpage Chadchartfanclub.[6] The memes portraying the hyperbolic heroification of Chadchart fared in a similar manner as those of Chuck Norris, the American martial art actor. In 2005, chucknorrisfacts.com featured funny facts about him with imaginary superpower, highlighting his masculinity and toughness. For example, "Chuck Norris has already been to Mars; that's why there are no signs of life," "Chuck Norris once kicked a horse in the chin. Its descendants are known today as Giraffes"

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[6] This page is no longer available on Facebook.

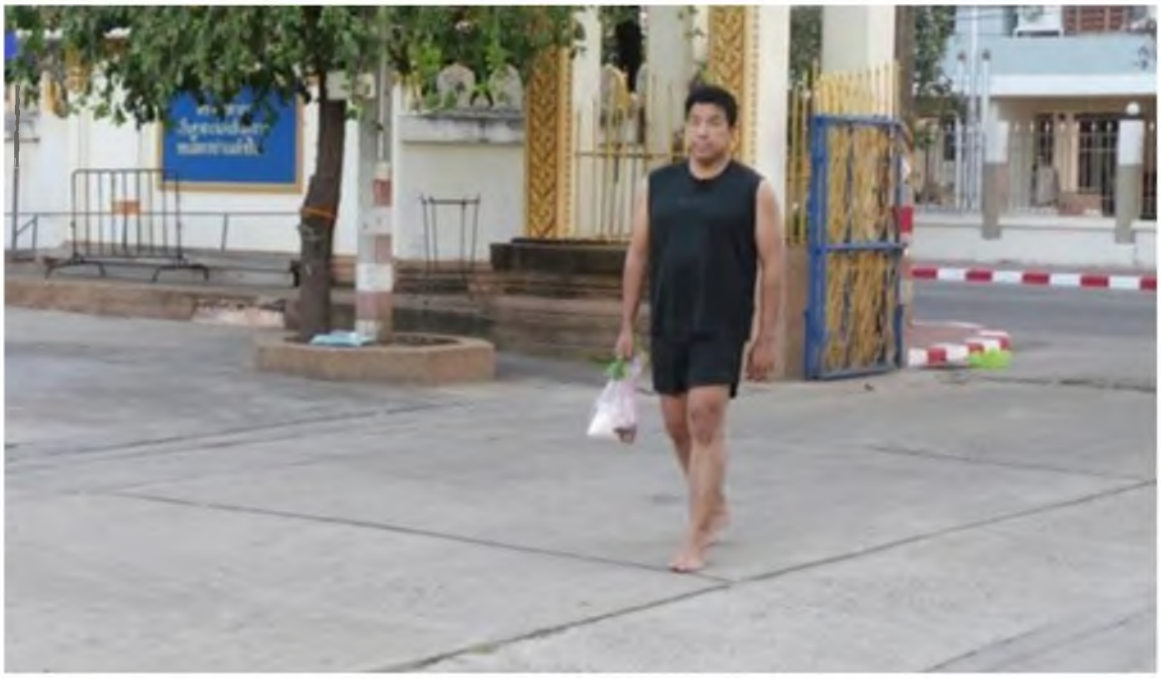

Figure 3.11 Chadchart Sittipunt's photo sparked multiplicities of memes on the Internet.

(Chuck Norris Facts). Norris became an Internet sensation. *Time* magazine in 2006 dubbed him as "an online cult hero" (Elder, 2001). These facts were made into memes and still circulate online today although the trend has subsided over the years. Similarly, Chadchart was dubbed "the Greatest Minister in the Universe." People collectively detailed the talents of Chadchart. "Some people kill two birds with one stone. But Chadchart killed two stones with one bird," "Neil Armstrong was the first man on the moon, but Chadchart is the first man on the sun," for example (Pantip Webboard, 2014).

It is the figure of Chadchart in the memes that survived and was later propagated in social media networks. His figure in these memes was intentionally replicated, portraying him as a being with superpower, walking on the moon, emitting lights, or blowing up things. People engage Chadchart into their worlds. Chadchart's figure was juxtaposed with the movie posters, Japanese manga, popular animation, the cover of

magazines, soccer games, fashion runways, outer space, Mars, among others (Than Chadchart who is the strongest in the universe, 2014). Since the last week of December 2013, many memes of Chadchart had been introduced, reposted to populate social media pages, Facebook feeds, particularly the Facebook Chutchart Power Fanpage,[7] and the popular webboard pantip.com. These memes were the means for people to participate in this popular culture. The laughs at the boundless imagination people engaged with Chadchart persuaded more people to generate their own memes with embodied acts. Numerous young people imitated or "cosplayed" his gesture in their real life settings, making the memes with themselves in his pose to share on social media. Now people could be Chadchart, appearing in a black sports outfit, carrying a meal bag, walking barefoot everywhere they could imagine. More people jumped in with creative ideas, proliferating Chadchart in other terrains such as smartphone cases, figurines, iPhone games, animation and parody music videos, among others.

The people's participation in generating and sharing memes galvanized support for Chadchart. In the comment sections of these memes, people expressed affection and admiration for him, referring to him as: "The ideal minister," "the real man," "the next Transport Minister after the elections," "every minister should be like him," for example. People embraced Chadchart as the admirable Transport Minister. This happened amidst hatred for politicians, when Thai society was swept by the dominant rhetoric of corrupt politicians and the will to bring down the allegedly corrupt Yingluck government. This distinction can be explained by Chadchart's background which differs from those of other

[7] This spelling differs from Chadchart's official page. The name in Thai is Rattamontreeteekangkrangteesudnaipattapee, literally meaning the Strongest Minister on Earth.

politicians. He is well-educated and comes from an elite family. Before taking up his post in the Yingluck government, he was a professor in Civil Engineering at a top-notch university. He was a hard working Transport Minister who took public transportation, such as the buses in Bangkok or the third class trains. He supervised both small and big projects, ranging from the reckless drivers of buses No. 8, known as the Fast and Furious on Bangkok streets, to the 2.2 trillion baht (60 billion USD) high-speed train project. Chadchart is very personable. He interacted and shared the stories of his encounters with commuters, the blind, bus conductors, and even the cat at the train station—a truly amiable person. Chadchart was enthusiastically embraced as both the Net Idol in the digital culture and the idealized politician since he shared the least resemblance to other politicians that people were persuaded to believe as corrupt and unfit for tasks. Chadchart was admired for being the politician who seemingly rose above all the other politicians and politics—the Super Minister.

The super being was the element in the memes that persisted in people's minds and propagated their visual replications. In addition to the humor people enjoyed, Chadchart's memes projected the superhero with the forceful power. In the video to mark the 100,000 likes on Chadchart's Fanpage, netizens photoshopped his photo with animation from the Superman's 75th Anniversary Animated Short. Chadchart was fighting PDRC Leader Suthep Tuagsuban and Thaksin Shinawatra (Chutchartpower Facebook Fanpage, 2014). Such portrayals, in spite of being produced to entertain, reflect the people's wish to see him win over these two leaders of the opposite factions. Thais would like to see someone who has the magical power to take Thailand beyond its political impasse and end the political turmoil that has been going on over the past

decade. Historically, Thai society has seen a mediator that could defuse political tension or confrontation between two political poles. The mediator—the superhero—can put a halt to the imminent confrontation. This partially explained why a number of Thai accepted the military coup d'état as a justified intervention that peacefully defused the political tension in 2006. The military was seen as the hero that deserved to be lauded and given flowers.

As these playful memes moved and traveled along the rhizomatic network of social media, the memes territorialized new spaces and frontiers for political discourse. The memes created by netizens were co-opted as nodal points to be intertextualized with political expressions. This was evident when Chadchart engaged in the collective participation in memes by adopting some of them on his Facebook page. The meme Evolution, which depicted Darwin's Theory of Evolution with Chadchart as the latest of this evolution, was reposted, cross-pollinated with Chadchart's political views (see Figure 3.12). He wrote:

> Previously, we did not let democracy evolve. Since the 1932 Revolution, we have had 13 coup d'états, 10 rebel acts, and 18 constitutions. We might prefer revolution to evolution since the former is abrupt, rendering drastic changes. We might become more familiar with revolution than evolution. The most recent revolution (coup d'état) was staged in 2006 and we had a new constitution in 2007. Now we say it's not good and we need to reform. Personally, I think democratic development has no shortcuts. It takes time. If revolution or reformation were the magical pill for Thailand's development, Thailand would have been the superpower country. On a contrary, this (the shortcut) has led to conflicts, hatred and severe divisiveness. Elections are crucial for the evolution of democracy—the critical mechanism to develop party system, policies, voters, and other institutions involved. The changes might not be as fast as in 1-2 years. But I think the systems have started to work and it takes time. Any changes (to the systems) should be in line with the rule of law and be open to the majority's opinion. Let's go to vote on February 2. You can vote for anyone or vote no. We are all equal. (Sittipunt, 2014)

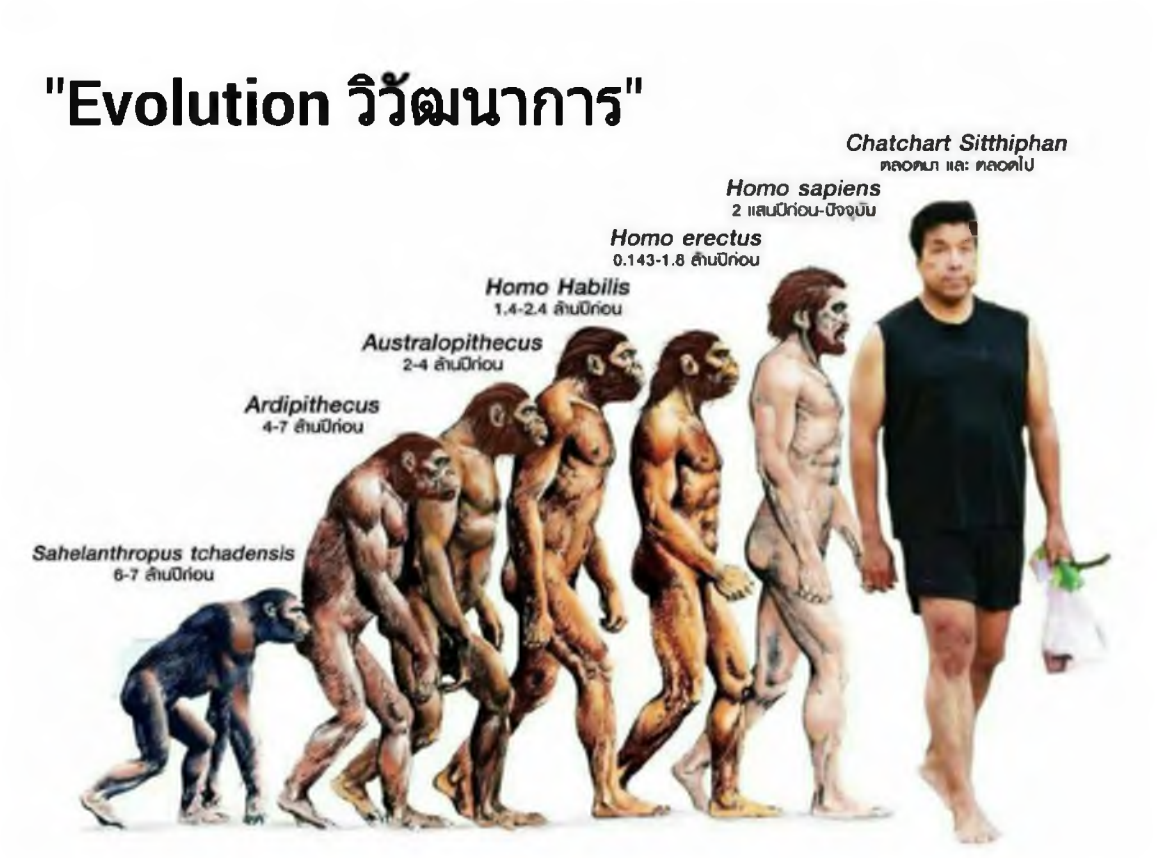

Figure 3.12 Transport Minister Chadchart Sittipunt adopted the meme about him to disseminate his view on democracy.

This expression of his political view was unusual on his Facebook page that normally communicated his daily activities and accounts of his encounters. Unfortunately, democracy was not let to evolve. The democratic means such as the February 2014 General Elections was successfully wrecked by the existing institutions of power, the Election Commission, the PDRC marches, the Democrats, and the people who refused to go to vote. Chadchart's memes and his popularity continued as he appeared on television shows and newspapers. However, after the coup d'état on May 22, 2014, Chadchart, the "Strongest Minister on Earth," along with six other politicians from the Puea Thai Party, were detained at the military camp for a week.

Rhizomes, broken, cut and shattered at a given point, will spring up again, on old or new lines. They "ceaselessly establish connections between semiotic chains" (Deleuze & Guattari, A thousand plateaus:Capitalism and schizophrenia, 1987, p. 7). The Chadchart meme-topia deterritorialized. The enthusiastic participation of people in generating creative Chadchart memes fizzled. But the ideas and creativity were there. They may make a rupture and create a line of flight in other forms.

Conclusion: Memes Accelerate Participation

Technology, according to McLuhan, "altered our relations to one another and to ourselves" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 8). The Ancient Romans' centralization was possible because of the invention of paper. The Japanese feudal government failed to remain in power due to the invention of money. In the past, trains not only introduced a new mode of transportation but also created new types of cities, work, and leisure. The heterogeneity of speeds creates rebellions and points for rupture, and the acceleration of the electronic age disrupts Western man's linear thoughts in the same manner as the Roman roads detribalized villages (McLuhan, 1964/2001). Today, social media forges a media ecology that facilitates loud, constant rupture. People can self-broadcast their political ideology in a one-to-many manner, taking advantage of a power previously reserved exclusively for traditional broadcasters. The rhizomatic character of the networked spaces of the Internet opens new avenues for people to propose ideas, concepts, or opinions to disseminate in nonhierarchical routes along the lines of Deleuzian rhizomatic ontology.

Political participation in the form that privileges leaders, and rationality with consensus, can now manifest in the form of fragmented visuals—memes. Thai politics

travel into people's personal networks where they are exposed to others' political memes, attracting others to agree, adopt, and proliferate them in their own networks. These memes are democratic in their manifestation, comprising multiplicities of voices. They are reappropriated by netizens whose identities play a lesser role than their discursive elements. Memes are materials that disseminate agencies, asking people to look, scrutinize, and decide what to do with them. They travel on the Internet, a space that can be decentered and nonhierarchical without a clear direction. Further, memes have no beginning or end. They are "intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25), situated in between things, coming and going instead of starting and finishing. Their presence disrupts linear thoughts.

While memes can be taken as lightly as jokes, or pictures of cats, or how-to clichés, they can also convey social and political critique through the visuals—pictures, photographs or video clips—appropriated into other entities. The memes discussed in this case study emerged during a time of heightened political crises that led to another political deadlock prior to the coup d'état in May 2014, which put the country under an oppressive military junta.

Although Morozov (2011) cautions that memes alone cannot lead to substantial change without solid organizations and some degree of hierarchical leadership, I argue that meme pranks offer horizontal movements—a new mode of political engagement that does not depend on rational speeches and hierarchical organization. Memes display people's participation. Memes display people's political agencies. People can and do take ownership of interpreting conflicted political events, seeking advocacy support, and even scrutinizing what they find problematic. Memes transmit their rhetorical force, offering a

fitting mediator that facilitates communication in an age of distraction, thriving vigorously in a modern culture that privileges sight.

Memes and the ecology of Thai social media networks dramatically accelerate people's political participation. The memes alone might not directly lead to abrupt change on structural levels, for that requires more alliances in the network, extending beyond the realm of memes. However, with the acceleration of information sharing and the ease of political participation, change is possible. The impetus for imminent change is fostered by memes. They are vibrant, fervent and unruly expressions of resistance, travelling along rhizomatic lines of networked communication.

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CHAPTER 4

MOCKING THE JUNTA: MOCKINGJAY,

ANTI 2014 COUP ACTIVISM

"Something in the world forces us to think."
Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.139

"Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible…"
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 96

After a decade of political turmoil, the Thai military staged another coup d'état to topple its democratically elected government on May 22, 2014. It was Thailand's 30th coup in the past 80 years. As before, the junta tried to justify its coup as the "necessary intervention" required to maintain peace in the country. This was later confirmed by an advisor to the king, Privy Council President Gen. Prem Tinasulanonda, who praised this coup as "a national rescue and military duty" (Nanuam, 2014). Given the context of media censorship under martial law, many people turned to social media applications as their means of communication, exchanging rumors, information and news not covered by mainstream media.

Similar to the 2006 anti-coup activism, people did not fail to take control of their narratives in politics, challenging the military's ruling and severe suppression of dissident views. Their fight and struggle were visible in different manifestations, traversing the

realm of cultural practices. The spectacle of the 2014 anti-coup resistance is remarkably distinctive. It has shifted from mass rallies on the streets to a sparse but mobile alliance of bodies. Previously, the protesters outnumbered the authorities who were armed to discipline these unruly bodies. In this resistance, the authorities outnumbered the protesters that showed up in small groups or not showing up as planned.

The anti-coup protesters appeared, appropriating symbols and playing Tom and Jerry with the junta—a high-stakes 'cat and mouse' game where activists lured military personnel into fruitless chases. These protesters were adopting and reappropriating gestures in popular culture, such as the three-fingered salute in *The Hunger Games*. When suppressed, the acts of defiance thrived like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes, flourishing from the points where they were cut or starting from new lines. They operated in the same manner as the "wisdom of the plants" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 11). These figures of resistance transformed into diverse forms of cultural activities, such as reading or eating a sandwich, distributing flyers on the streets, hosting online talk shows, radio plays, or organizing talks and seminars, among others.

In this chapter, the focus is on the visuals of the resistance performed on the streets and later mediated and circulated in online terrains. These are the visuals of unruly bodies that went out to generate events to be captured by cameras, oftentimes via smartphones, and connected with social media applications. Importantly, they included the photos they took of themselves—selfies, readily made to be broadcast through people's personal networks when traditional media are controlled under martial law. The assemblages of selfies are mediating points, connected to other actants to disseminate the acts of resistance. The visuals bearing defiant acts inspired by Western popular culture,

such as the three-fingered salute from *The Hunger Games*, succeeded in being picked up by global media, building an anti-coup alliance. The Guardian called this The Mockingjay Movement (The Guardian, 2014).

This chapter examines people's political struggle and resistance through visual forms in the age of hyperocular culture, paying particular attention to the amplifications that occur over mediated communication networks, such as social media. It charts out the changing cartography of resistance in the digital era, tracing the self-initiated anti-coup resistance of unruly bodies, the unscripted gatherings that generate visuals such as selfies made to fit communication mobility, and the use of extralinguistics, a feature that is characteristic of visuals in social activism. It reconfigures the spectacle of political resistance in three aspects. First, these are self-initiated diffused gatherings with horizontal structure, with no orators or speeches. In 2014, we started to see decentralized individuals who came out to express their political opinions on the streets. In addition, a new demographic of young people in protests was eagerly generating digital forms of visuals of the unruly bodies—the selfies, territorializing the online terrain. Second, these self-initiated acts engage popular culture and reappropriate fictional symbols to significantly attract more allies, including mainstream and global media attention. Lastly, these visuals staged offline and circulated in social media generated extralinguistic conversations between the protesters and the junta, bringing out another reality of citizenship and oppression in the society ruled by the despotic regime.

Like DeLuca's image events (DeLuca, 1999a), these new communication genres, such as video clips or selfies, might not yield immediate results in politics; however, they problematize people's collective consciousness, raising questions about possibilities,

what can be otherwise and whether this is the kind of world they want to live in. The following section discusses the conditions and tensions between state suppression and the people's embodied acts to express their political resistance. The cartography of social movements has shifted from mass rallies to decentralized individuals in resistance, generating self-initiated acts that merge with the technology of network communication, allowing for an amplification of the visual force of protests in the digital age.

Suppression Versus Unruly Citizens

The Thai Army had exploited the state apparatus of martial law to legitimately control dissent the week before the coup. On the day of the coup d'état, May 22, 2014, the Army detained the leaders of two political movements: one, the tricolored antigovernment, elite-backed PDRC and two, its archrival UDD Red Shirts. *Thairath*, the most popular newspaper, described the unnerving details that the UDD leaders were detained, and "blind-folded" in white vans, taken from the military's compound (Thairath, 2014, May 23). In addition to such detention, suppression in other forms was blatant. Anti-coup protesters were arrested from day one. Later, the junta summoned more people, ranging from politicians to university professors, to "report" to the authorities or "have their attitudes corrected." These people's names were called out in the military's daily announcements and broadcast on every television station. Seminars and talks at universities were halted by authorities. Rumors of people being abducted from their houses, which circulated on social media, turned out to be true. The ruling military strictly controlled people's disagreement, while generating fear to keep everyone in line.

Under these conditions, it was not possible to rally mass protests. However, under severe suppression from institutions of power, individuals resorted to using their bodies as resources for resistance. Scholars have posited bodies as political actors. Human bodies are the sites of discourse and contestation (Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1978). In communication, bodies can be the source of argumentation and advocacy (DeLuca, 1999b), and activists utilize their bodies as means to form arguments in protests. Anderson (2010) argues that people whose freedom is taken away turn to using their bodies as political arguments through protests in prisons or clinics. These are the visuals that communicate people's struggle against the oppressive practices that involve possible violation of their bodies. Their willingness to risk being hurt or killed illuminates their political agencies and the vulnerable conditions of their lives under the control of the regime.

In past resistance against the Thai military coups, in 1992 for example, decentralized individuals such as Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang and Pilot Officer Chalad Worachat effectively used their bodies to stage hunger strikes. Callahan (1998) argued that these symbolic acts illustrated the power of the "denial of material goods." The force of the peaceful action of these individuals subsequently led to mass rallies to oust military dictator Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon.[1] It was an effort to fight without guns. It is also worth noting that both individuals who started the hunger strike to protest against dictatorship held military rank and were well-known in Thai society.

More recent resistance against the coup was staged in 2006 by an ordinary

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[1] His Majesty the King granted the audience to Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon and Maj. Gen Chamlong Srimuang after the violent crackdown in May 1992. It marked the end of the political clash. Gen. Suchinda resigned from premiership.

individual who put his body on the line. Taxi driver Nuamthong Priwan, 60, crashed his taxi into a tank at the Royal Plaza to express his disagreement with the coup (Bhumiprabhas, 2006). He survived the crash but was badly injured. The military commented on his crash as the act of a citizen without political agency. The junta's Deputy Spokesman Col. Akara Thiproj said, "No one would give up his life for his political ideology" (The Nation, 2006, November 2). This exemplified how the military and its supporters viewed Thai citizens, and his contemptuous comment prompted Nuamthong to respond. In his interview with iTV on October 14, 2006, Nuamthong said with tears brimming in his eyes, "I do not want to live under the junta's ruling." Only weeks later on October 31, 2006, he hanged himself from the elevated crosswalk in front of the headquarters of Thailand's biggest newspaper, *Thairath*, the newspaper that often features dead bodies on its front page. His own body eventually made it onto the paper's cover — the final image event he staged as he left the world. His body, dangling from the elevated crosswalk, was found with a cardboard paper on which he had written, "A former taxi driver gives up his life for democracy and responds to the insult of Deputy Spokesman Col. Akara Thiproj that no one would give up his life for his or her political ideology" (Thairath, 2006, November 1). His action "spoke" to the military and society, communicating that at least one citizen did find death more preferable than being ruled by the junta that toppled the elected government. This illustrates the cost that an ordinary man—a taxi driver like Nuamthong—had to pay to be heard or recognized as a citizen who had something to say to society. More importantly, to defend his position as a citizen with political agency, Nuamthong exercised the control he has over his body, giving up his life.

This might be an extreme use of the body for political expression, as it is an ephemeral act that cannot be repeated. In addition, taking one's own life might not be an option for other individuals. However, the hunger strike, after being repeatedly employed, might not obtain the same degree of attention from news media as *The Hunger Games*. Protests with bodies on location and reliance on the media to broadcast their events might not suffice, particularly in the case of Thailand where the media were under the control of martial law. Furthermore, with the history of violent suppression of mass protests in 2010, people treaded more cautiously in each move of their fight. The spectacles of resistance transformed to become more decentralized, rhizomatic, and subversive in the play of power. Individuals showed up to express their political views at different gatherings. Their acts of defiance, engaged with the gesture from *The Hunger Games*, proliferated in the form of selfies, the spectacles of unruly individuals, performing acts of defiance against the coup.

The Visuals of Unruly Bodies in 2014 Anticoup Resistance

What was evident in the resistance against the 2014 coup was the spectacle of bodies on the streets that changed from mass rallies to smaller groups or decentered individuals who arranged for loosely organized gatherings via social media networks. The bodies still played a crucial role in generating image events, including "selfie events," to disseminate their acts of defiance. Individuals are the bodies that were active and engaged in performing, sharing, and broadcasting what they did, saw, or witnessed on the streets.

The earliest contestation of the 2014 coup cropped up immediately after the coup

occurred. This contestation transpired in the form of a self-initiated, unruly gathering held in front of the Bangkok Art and Culture Center in downtown Bangkok. Decentralized individuals showed up with banners, shouting, "Junta, get out" (Prachatai, 2014, May 23). In this event, visuals of the bodies were captured and mediated by technology, such as smartphone cameras, to be uploaded to YouTube and amplified on social media networks. Five protesters were arrested that evening (Prachatai, 2014, May 23). However, that did not deter people from continuing to assemble. In the following days, more people, some wearing symbolic red shirts, gathered at a McDonald's restaurant in the city's prime shopping area.[2] One man wearing a red shirt, later self-identified as Pinyoparb Bamroongdharm, sat in front of the McDonald's and started shouting, "I'm embarrassed of Thailand. I am not famous but I'm a Thai" (Siam, 2014). A group of soldiers approached him and dragged him away from the scene. The press and witnesses relentlessly ran after the soldiers who were trying to take Bamroongdharm to their van. He continued yelling, "I don't have anything to eat…I don't have any weapon. Soldiers hurt people. Thailand is embarrassing. Why is everyone standing still? Thailand is embarrassing." Other protesters yelled at the soldiers, "Why do you arrest him? What does he do?" One man with a smartphone camera, along with other witnesses, ran after them, so the entire chase was captured and posted on YouTube. This video also revealed other witnesses' attempts to capture the arrest with their phones. The military could not simply take any "body" or do anything to these "bodies" in public without being recorded. Individual citizens were constantly wired to the Internet and social media networks, holding new currencies in communication with thousands of followers on their

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[2] This is the scene where the red shirt protesters occupied in 2010 and culminated in the state massacre, killing over 90 people.

social media feeds, connected to other nodal points, extending to other hundreds of thousands. The video of the man being dragged away by soldiers was viewed nearly 240,000 times (Siam, 2014). Media censorship could no longer completely censor such incidents.

Subsequent anti-coup gatherings were planned and facilitated through social media. People showed up at the Victory Monument, for example, at 5 p.m. every evening. The spectacle of these gatherings unveiled the visibility of new faces. Dressed in Thai *sarongs* and holding signs condemning the coup at the Victory Monument, a group by the name of *Romanov Girls* made it to the cover of *Matichon Weekend* newsmagazine (Matichon Weekend, 2014, May 30 – June 5). This visuality revealed more diversity and a younger demographic of anti-coup protesters—a contrast to those arrested earlier—comprising middle-aged and grassroots people. These young people made their political statements with their bodies as well as the visuals of themselves engaged in street protests, making a voluntary decision to risk being arrested for voicing their political views.

These anti-coup protesters enhanced their unruly expressions of resistance, reconfiguring and subverting the power in the games they set up to play with the junta. Social activist Sombat Boonngam-anong started his game by reappropriating the popular culture as his act of defiance, the kind that is adaptive to institutions of power. Boonngam-anong failed to report to the junta after he was summoned. Instead, he posted a meme of himself with the label, *Catch Me if You Can,* challenging the junta to catch him as he was on the run. Protesters were also playing this kind of game with the authorities—infuriating them by showing up at protest sites, and sometimes failing to

show up. On May 29, 2014, when the police sealed off the entire area around the Victory Monument, netizens—myself included—broke this news on Facebook and Twitter to call off the planned gatherings. Five prisoner trucks were parked at the site. Vendors around the area were instructed by the police to go home. No protesters showed up except for two women. One of them held a sign reading, "No Fascist." These two lone unruly bodies standing in front of media professionals stationed around the venue were arrested even though they were unarmed females who showed up with merely a piece of paper to voice their political views.

Tensions between the people struggling for political expression and the suppressive state played out in the anti-coup activism. Wherever there is coercion, resistance occurs. Both exist in mixture. According to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the smooth and the striated, the state apparatus operates like a top-to-bottom vertical structure, striated in all directions to create homogeneity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 489). The state's striation is motivated by anxiety of what passes, flows or varies. The smooth space seen in the attributes of the sea and desert was striated by navigation and longitude, making this measurable. However, such striation to control is not without limits. The space can evade striation by declination or the minimum angle that deviated from the vertical. "That is where free action in smooth space must have been conquered" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 490). Power is not solely at the center, but everywhere, traversing social stratifications and individuals (Foucault, 1978).

As the junta continued to striate the smooth space—the adaptive protesters, the latter quickly altered their moves, creating their smooth space to allow for free actions of political expression. Their resistance became more diffused, tactful, and unruly. More

importantly, the resistance enacted by decentered individuals destabilized the junta's ruling, creating ruptures for creative ways of being and resisting. Individuals took ownership of their acts of resistance, generating selfies, quickly leaving the scene, mingling with the crowd in public places, and posting their visuals of resistance from their smartphones. Sombat, who was then on the run, persuaded people to flash *The Hunger Games'* three-fingered salute as an act of defiance against the junta. College students staged another act of resistance by forming a group to read books in public places, including inside the underground train. Others organized a picnic to watch *The Hunger Games* while eating sandwiches. These visuals of self-initiated unruly bodies, showing up at different locations in the capital city of Bangkok, were captured and posted on social media, the smooth space where these visuals evade striation. The images territorialized Facebook walls and the minds of onlookers, spreading along the lines of the network that connect them together. More self-initiated events and selfies proliferated the online terrain as well as global press coverage.

Decentered Individuals and Their Self(ies)-Initiated Resistance: The Mockingjay Movement

On Sunday, June 1, 2014, an anti-coup masquerade party was planned at the upscale Ratchaprasong shopping area, but authorities were prepared. Mainstream news and people's social media feeds reported that more than 400 soldiers and 300 police in plainclothes were patrolling the area. At 10 a.m., the scheduled time of the party, the protesters subverted the power in this game by not showing up. An hour later, an elderly lady in her 70s showed up and was immediately arrested. The party was rearranged and

coordinated through social media. At noon the next day, many protesters gathered at another shopping mall, Terminal 21. They staged a flash mob, made the three-fingered salute from *The Hunger Games*, and took selfies to post on social media (Thairath Online, 2014, June 2a). The British Channel 4 reported that Thai People found a new way to protest (Channel 4, 2014, June 1).

Police and soldiers chased these protesters and closed down the malls. A Humvee and an armored car equipped with a machine gun were deployed to the area. But the protesters dispersed, mingling into the crowd. The force of the event when the authorities adamantly attempted to quiet these protesters was catching fire. On social media, people's selfies with *The Hunger Games'* three-fingered salute were thriving, while some selfies featured merely the gesture without faces. Others showed this symbol of resistance coupled with other symbols of authorities, such as military or police uniforms. This visual of resistance flourished beyond the social media terrain.

The protesters' use of scenes from movies when participating in real and meaningful political dissent might sound trivial; however, I argue that *The Hunger Games'* three-fingered salute in this case was an appropriate use in the case of the social movements, and efficaciously communicated people's politics to the global community. The appropriation and propagation of this gesture was bolstered by the emerging culture of "selfies," making it easy for people to adopt and share in the networked communication. The gesture also exerts its force by building allies, as people adopted these visuals and mainstream media featured them on their media outlets. The visuals of resistance subsequently galvanized and transgressed the acts of resistance. The protesters' actions destabilized the junta's justification to stage the coup and its sheer suppression of

political expressions. These visual acts, populating social media in the days after the initial military coup, started extralinguistic conversations between the regime and Thai society as these acts unfolded.

The Self(ies)-Initiated Activism

Smartphone technology has allowed users to take photos and then instantaneously post them to social media sites. Individuals can introduce issues that are relevant to their lives on their personal networks. These issues range from complaints about traffic to political advocacy for social justice. Photos of the "self" and the culture of "selfies" carry rhetorical force in a similar manner to posters in advertising that hail attention to products. While it is evident that visuals of celebrities can attract people's attention, in the digital age of networked communication, ordinary individuals can also "voice" their opinions by means of their self-portraits.

In addition, popular means of communication through social platforms such as selfies can be used in social critiques and advocacy in the networked communication. They are *events* that disrupt normalized social and political practices. The ease and convenience of smartphones and communication technology have proliferated the practice and popularized the term "selfies." The year 2013 was categorically the year of selfies, when even the Pope had his first "Papal selfie" go viral on social media (Alexander, 2013). It was not surprising when Oxford Dictionaries named "selfie" as the Word of the Year 2013. The term "selfie" is defined as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). Selfies can be seen as frivolous popular culture or

self-promotion, as in the case of Hollywood selfies by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Justin Bieber, who have shared their selfies daily with their followers. Despite existing criticism of selfies as an indicator of narcissism or mental disorder, selfies should not be reduced simply to symptoms or mental conditions. Selfies, posted on social media, clearly provide a way for people to offer themselves up "for public consumption" (Day, 2013). Although these selfies might feature the self in ubiquitous acts, showing minute details of their lives, the photos depict what the taker considers worth posting or sharing with friends or the public. Selfies give people the power to control the portrayal of their bodies and what they would like others to see (Tiidenberg, 2014). Selfies, like photography, are *events*. Sontag (1973) sees photography as an "Event: something worth seeing—and therefore worth photographing....Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's intervention" (Sontag, 1973, p. 11). Events witnessed through photographs become more real than those without. This is evident in the case of photographs of cruelty in World War II or atrocities in conflict zones. While photographs bring distant subjects and matters of this world closer to our "selves," I argue that selfies in activism are events that are worth seeing, seeking attention when society at large fails to pay attention.

In May 2014, high-profile figures, such as Michelle Obama, posted photos of themselves with a sign reading #BringBackOurGirls in the wake of the mass kidnap of more than 200 Nigerian schoolgirls a month earlier (Kaplan, 2014), (see Figure 4.1). Other celebrities, such as Anne Hathaway, Alicia Keys, and Amy Poehler, also posted their portraits, holding signs with this hashtag. These visuals are assemblages, connecting the pictures of celebrities, the hashtags and the kidnap in Nigeria. These visuals brought.

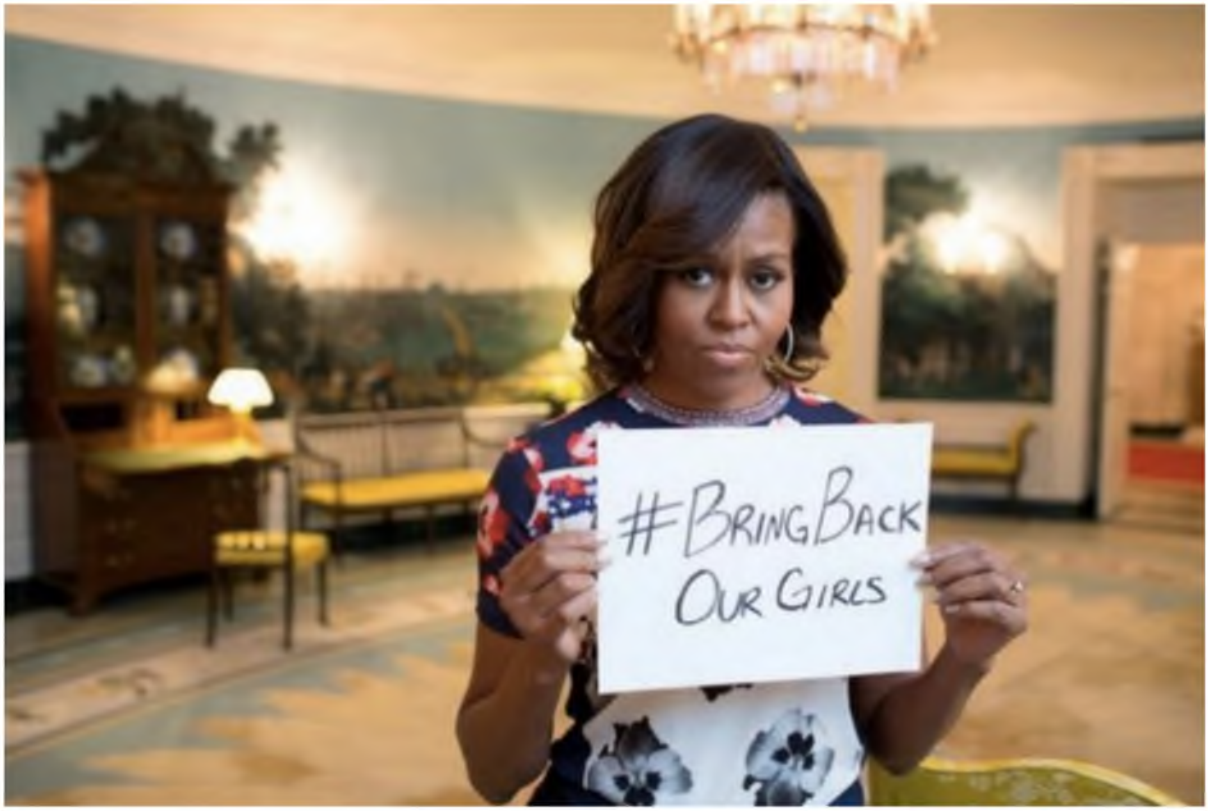

Figure 4.1 Michelle Obama tweeted a photo of herself with the sign #BringBackOurGirls, illuminating the incident of 200 Nigerian girls captured by Boko Haram (Photo: The White House).

the issue of girls kidnapped in Africa closer to Americans, redirecting attention to what is scarcely covered in American mainstream media

Decentralized individuals can also illuminate problems and issues that are close to them and directly affect their lives by introducing visuals of themselves in order to critique social practices they find problematic. Marginalized people present visuals of themselves as a means to practice citizenship and expose structural policy that discriminates against them. One outstanding example is the case of people critiquing the media practice of featuring a photo of Michael Brown, shot dead by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014. On Twitter, people tweeted two portraits of themselves with the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. These tweets were made in

response to media coverage of the murder of Michael Brown. NBC featured Brown's photo showing his hand in a peace sign that was thought of as a gangster sign (NBC, 2014). People reacted to this biased media practice by offering a pair of photos of themselves: one engaged in negative acts such as drinking or being a member of a gang; the other engaged in positive acts such as graduation or volunteer works. It invoked people to discuss the visual portrayal of people of color, often portrayed in the "as if" rather than "as is" (Zelizer, 2010).

More people in the Twitterverse joined these "conversations" by posting two pictures of themselves with the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, which picture would they use? (see Figure 4.2). The self-portraits that people introduced to challenge the media coverage went viral and were featured in major news agencies across the country, including *NPR, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Time*, *BuzzFeed, Mashable*, and others. An NBC spokeswoman said the photo came from Brown's Facebook profile picture (Vega, 2014). The gangster-style photo of Michael Brown was later taken down and replaced with one of him gazing at the camera (see Figure 4.3). These people's self-initiated critique via self-portraits problematized the media practice in the portrayal of people of color, unmasking the media's perpetuation of stereotypes.

In Thailand, netizens posted visuals of themselves to campaign for Akong, Grandpa), or Ampon Tangnoppakul, 61, who was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment for sending text messages deemed insulting to the Thai monarchy in November 2011 (Fuller, 2011). Inspired by the Abhaya Movement (Fearlessness) in Burma, Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a Thai scholar based in Singapore, persuaded people to join the Thailand's Fearlessness: Free Akong campaign by posting photos of their palms with

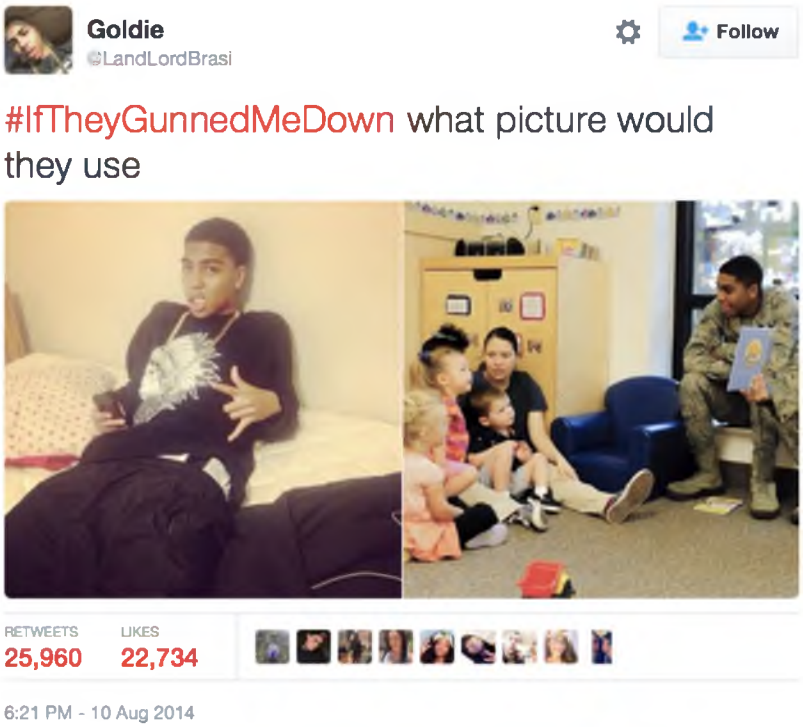

Figure 4.2 Twitter users posted their self-portraits questioning the media bias in portraying Michael Brown. (https://twitter.com/LandLordBrasi/status/498625226133868544)

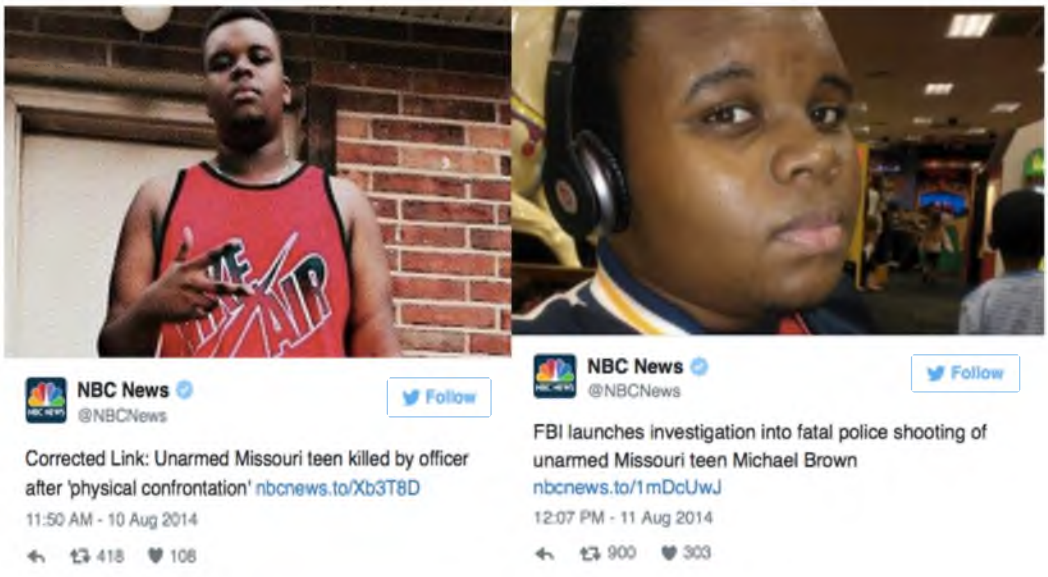

Figure 4.3 NBC quickly changed the photo of Michael Brown after criticism on Twitter. (Photo on Left: https://twitter.com/NBCNews/status/498526729728565250/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc^tfw Right: https://twitter.com/NBCNews/status/498893379552309248/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc^tfw)

the word "Akong." The campaign was aimed at generating conversations about the century-old *lese majeste* law that forbids criticism against the monarchy and about pushing for the release of Akong and other political prisoners. More than 500 people contributed their photos, some of which partially covered their faces while showing their palms with the "Akong" message (see Figure 4.4). One writer and critic, Kampaka also known as Lakkana Panwichai, revealed more than a palm. She stripped naked and wrote "No Hatred for Naked Heart" (Bhumiprabhas, 2011). These photos were put into a book of the same name of the campaign (Chachavalpongpun, 2012). Proceeds from the book sales, priced at 112 baht each, which matches the Article 112 *lese majeste* law, went to Akong's family (Prachatai, 2011, December 15).

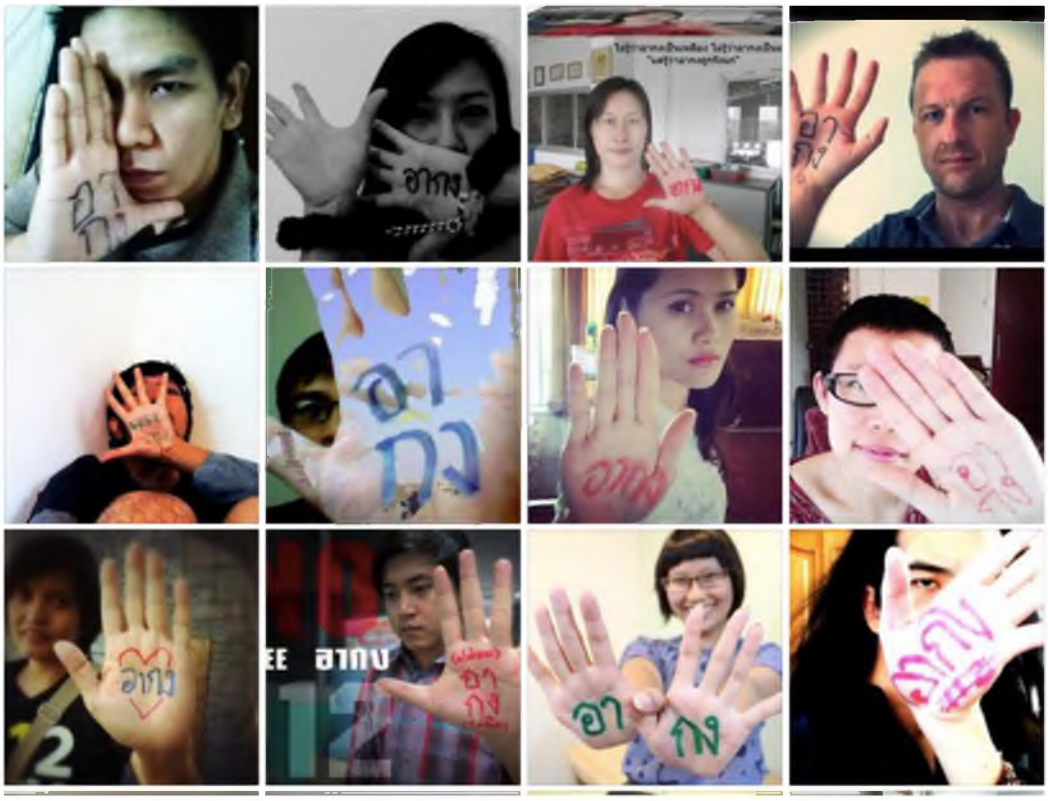

Figure 4.4 People contributed their self portraits to advocate for justice for Akong. (Photos: Pavin Chatchavalpongpun's Facebook Fearlessness Album 2).

Akong died in prison 6 months later. However, visuals of other bodies with their palms bearing his name proliferating the story of Akong, who was convicted for the crime of conscience. These visuals also problematized the judicial system that proved the action of someone based on unreliable proof of text messages and IMEI number of the cell phone.

People in Thailand are enthusiastic about selfies. The Capital City of Bangkok is the "Selfiest City in the World," according to *Time* magazine (Wilson, 2014, March 10). It is not surprising that selfies are adopted as a means to present their political views. The Thai protesters generated selfie events and posted these visuals of themselves flashing the three-fingered salute to show their resistance to the coup. This was a drastic turn from earlier times when selfies were used as part of military propaganda to justify political intervention. In the wake of the 2006 coup, before the word "selfie" was coined, people went out to take photos with soldiers and tanks at the Royal Thai Army Headquarters. Their selfies were used to show public support for the military and the coup, and were featured on the front pages of mainstream newspapers. A few days before the 2014 coup, martial law and the deployment of soldiers at different locations in the city prompted selfies with soldiers to spread on social media feeds. *The Associated Press* and the photo wire *Getty Images* featured a surge of reports on photos of both Thais and foreigners taking selfies with soldiers (Ries, 2014)(see Figure 4.5).

The Washington Times tweeted, "Thailand: Birthplace of the Martial Law Selfie" along with a photo of two women aiming for a selfie with soldiers and a machine gun in the backdrop (The Washington Times, 2014). *BuzzFeed* headlined, "People in Thailand are taking selfies with soldiers because what else do you do during a coup in 2014"

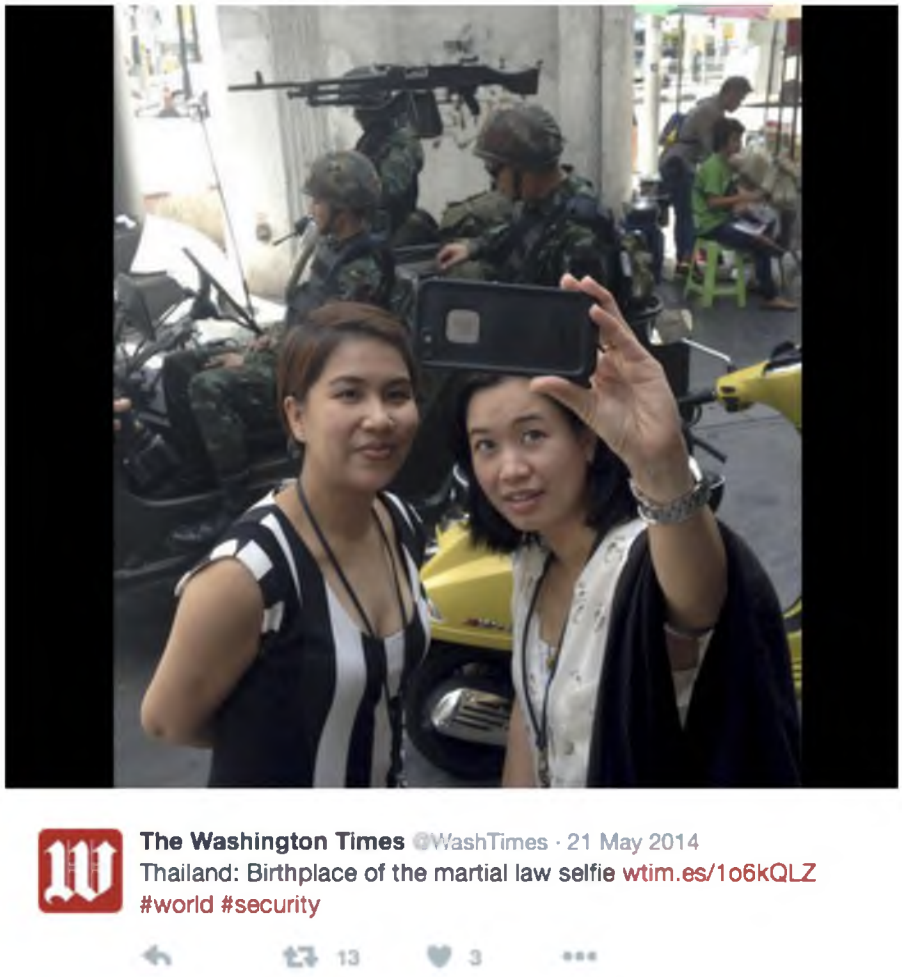

Figure 4.5 People take a selfie with soldiers patrolling the city (Photo: https://twitter.com/WashTimes/status/469151747941089280/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc^tfw).

(Berger, 2014). Thai media featured photos of people giving the military support where soldiers were stationed (Thairath, 2014, May 26). The selfies with the soldiers were events that people endorsed as pictures worth seeing. They brought the soldiers closer to our "selves." The selfies display these people's agreement in the use of military intervention in political crisis. They were co-opted by the military to propagate that its action was justified. However, Thai visual media critic Pracha Suweeranont warned the junta that selfies might not be as effective in heroifying the military in this coup if it resorted to solving problems by means of threats and force (Suweeranont, 2014).

The use of force was stark. Since the day of the coup, the military has announced on television the names of people required to "report" to the authorities at different military offices. Protests against the coup in Bangkok the day after were immediately suppressed. Five protesters were arrested that evening (Prachatai, 2014), including Thanapol Eawsakul, the editor of the liberal magazine, *Under the Same Sky* (Komchadluek, 2014). Dissent was not limited to protests on the streets; it was everywhere. Selfies were adopted by protesters to show dissent and disagreement with the military coup, and these proliferated in digital territories. Decentralized individuals generated various forms of selfies, making visible the bodies that refused to be disciplined. These selfies sought attention, territorializing both on-site and online spaces. People posted selfies showing their anti-coup acts. One example is the selfie of two college students who might have seemingly replicated the expression of admiration for the military; however, the message on their sign indicated the opposite. In French and English, the sign denounced the coup, reading "L'Anti Coup D'état, killing Thai people will not keep you in power. Giving Thai people democracy will" (see Figure 4.6).

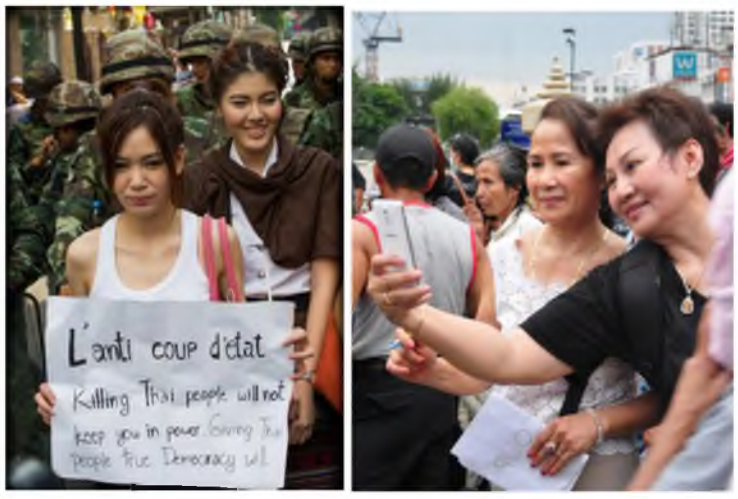

Figure 4.6 Selfies of various forms were widely embraced in people's expression of dissent against the 2014 military coup d'état in Thailand.

Anti-coup selfies are not uniform, but have transformed into countless variations. The strongest visual of these anti-coup selfies was the reenactment of the three-fingered salute from *The Hunger Games*, a symbol of popular culture that dramatically amplified the visuals of resistance toward global media coverage.

From Fiction to Reality: The Appropriation of Popular Culture in Activism

Popular culture often serves as a rich source of ideas and motivations for social actions. Edward Snowden, who leaked information about the U.S. government's mass surveillance program, said he was influenced by the morality in video games in which everyday characters played against the indomitable forces of injustice and won (Reitman, 2013). Another popular example is the comic strip, *V for Vendetta*, which inspired people when it was transformed into film with a distinctly political and visceral affect, leading people to adopt Guy Fawkes masks in social activism, including that by the online hacktivism group, Anonymous (Ott, 2010). Lloyd commented, "It's a great symbol of protest for anyone who sees tyranny" (Murphy, 2011). WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and Occupy Wall Street protesters also embraced these masks as part of the symbolism of their dissent (Lush & Dobnik, 2011). The masks also offered a practical function for people who wanted to support the Occupy movement but did not want to risk losing their jobs (Murphy, 2011).

The hand gesture of the three-fingered salute in *The Hunger Games* was inspiring for Thailand's anti-coup protesters to fight against the fascist government by using symbols from the film and story as part of their iconography. These protesters sought symbolic acts to communicate with the public, appropriating the fictional gesture as their expression of resistance.

In *The Hunger Games* book version, the three-fingered salute was first introduced when character Katniss Everdeen was volunteering to join the annual Hunger Games on behalf of her sister, and other characters in District 12 reacted to her move. Collins describes the gesture as follows:

> At first one, then another, then almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district, occasionally seen at funerals. It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love. (Collins, 2008, p. 24)

In the sequel, *Catching Fire*, the salute that started as a gesture of thanks, admiration and goodbye became a symbol of resistance against the Capitol. Moreover, the symbol generated such public support that those in power began to view it as a threat, a rallying cry for those who would oppose their rule. During Katniss' Victory Tour, the scene depicted the despotic Capitol took this gesture as an act of resistance that had to be stopped. The man who flashed this gesture to Katniss was arrested and shot on the spot.

Thai protesters reappropriated this gesture, giving it new meaning. A Twitter user by the name of Manik Sethisuwan tweeted a photo of himself raising his fingers in *The Hunger Games* gesture with a bandana covering half of his face, writing "Dear #HungerGames. We've taken your sign as our own. Our struggle is non-fiction. Thanks. #ThaiCoup #Thailand" (Sethisuwan, 2014) (see Figure 4.7).

The gesture's meaning was redefined. The *Thai Rath* newspaper reported on June 2, 2014 that the three-fingered salute signified freedom, equality, and fraternity. What is clear and consistent with the movie is that the symbol defies the authorities' suppression. The use of the symbol clearly demarcates and identifies the two sides of the conflict—differentiating between the freedom loving "districts," and the oppressive, despotic

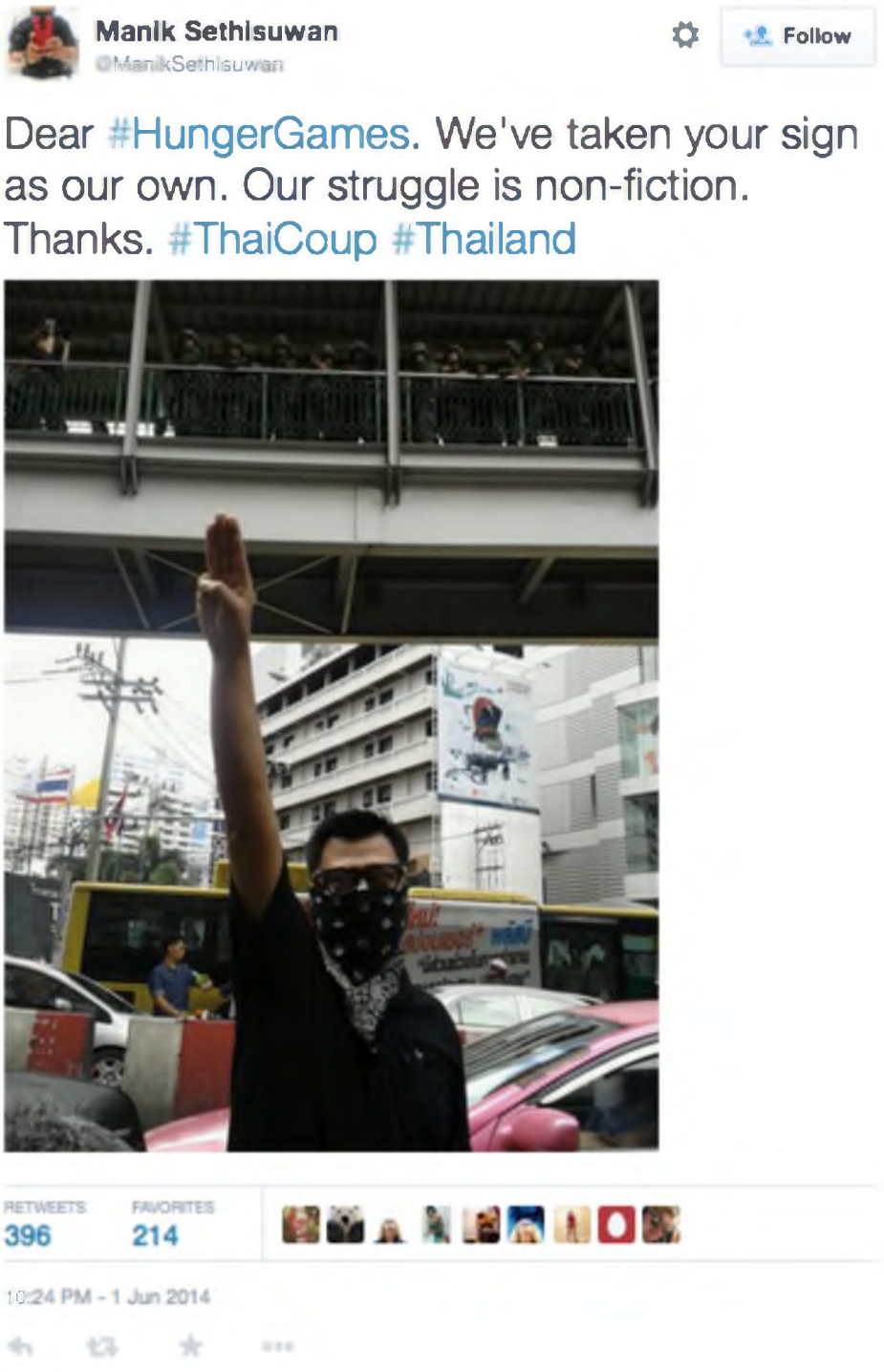

Figure 4.7 The three-fingered salute's meanings were appropriated for anti-coup activism in Thailand.

government.

In June 2014, people replicated this scene, staging this gesture in public. They were immediately arrested and suppressed. Selfies depicting this gesture operated rhizomatically, adapting to the ruthless suppression of the military. These selfies excluded faces, making it more difficult for the authorities to identify their takers. The faces were covered by other hands or the masks of political activists. Alternately, some were digitally masked by cat faces. Other selfies simply featured the three-fingered salute, juxtaposed with their military uniforms or signs of government affiliation. People did not want to be arrested; yet, they did not want to silence themselves. The visuals of their faceless selfies were evidence in the visual realm that challenged the junta's regime. These selfies are material events that disrupt the military ruling. They are things that Latour (1986) mentioned as the "visuality" that can be shown to others before convincing them to get on board with them.

This symbol of resistance, promoted by Hollywood industry, operates as a symbol that succinctly communicates and truncates political complexity in the resistance against the oppressive regime. It is a handy gesture that expresses political views, solidarity, and support, without placards, words, or colors of T-shirts. The symbol becomes political shorthand, imbued with meaning. It hails attention to society, calling people to take notice of their presence and their actions. The fictional dystopian state is brought into focus, unraveling before our eyes in real-life Thailand. People who have seen *The Hunger Games* film and its sequels are able to connect the fictional rebellion with the Thai protesters' adoption of the three-fingered salute gesture and their struggle. This adoption was amplified by the current culture of selfies and telecommunication

technology that rapidly proliferates the spectacles of resistance. The three-fingered salute was featured in the form of selfies and selfie events to advocate for defiance. The Thai protesters actively generated, posted, and shared these on their social networks.

Selfies Aggregate New Allies

Following the protests, *The Hunger Games* gesture generated cascades of visuals such as selfies, photographs of acts of defiance, and gatherings featured on mainstream media, as well as video clips that people captured and shared on social media. These visuals inspired and aggregated new allies. After social activist Sombat Boonngam-anong's *Catch Me If You Can* act of resistance came to a halt because he was arrested by the police on June 5, 2014, more allies emerged. The display of *The Hunger Games* symbol of resistance was catching fire among supporters. In the days that followed, faithful allies and prodemocracy advocates came out to express their opposition to the coup, risking being detained by the junta. The visuals of this gesture and unruly bodies continued to territorialize social media feeds, depicting people's self-initiated events of resistance.

A group of students organized through Facebook a gathering to watch *The Hunger Games* at a picnic at Kasetsart University in Bangkok, but the police showed up and told them to cancel the event. While martial law prohibited public gatherings of more than five people, attending a funeral was not illegal. At the funeral of former deputy House Speaker Apiwan Wiriyachai, attendees took the opportunity to express their political views. The event had been presided over by former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, politicians, and Red Shirt sympathizers. This event was similar to the scene

in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, when Katniss and Peeta were speaking at a gathering in District 11 to mourn the death of Rue and Thresh. Then, the elderly man whistled the mocking jay tune and raised the three-fingered salute, prompting others to follow, showing solidarity with the two deceased. In real life in Thailand, funeral attendees flashed the gesture to show support for Yingluck, ousted by the junta. The symbol expressed the solidarity of those attendees and those who opposed the coup. Photos of the event were shared extensively on social media sites (BBC Thai, 2014, October 19), although mainstream news media and the official Facebook page of Yingluck Shinawatra featured only other photos of the funeral, not those of the three-fingered gesture. The photo of the funeral in Thailand was later juxtaposed with the scene from *The Hunger Games* (see Figure 4.8). More Thai protesters showed up with anti-coup signs at movie theaters premiering *The Mockingjay* film across Europe and the United States, generating selfie events. At the world premiere of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part I* in London, a group of Thai protesters flashed the sign #DistrictThai in front of the Odeon Theater in London on November 10, 2014. Their #DistrictThai sign was featured on the theater's gigantic screens. The Odeon Theater itself even tweeted its support, writing "#DistrictThai are in town and they look awesome. A for effort! #mockingjay" (Odeon Cinemas, 2014). These protesters galvanized more awareness of the political issue and further inspired support for the prodemocracy protesters back home in Thailand.

In Thailand, the junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha was greeted with the salute for the first time when he visited Northeastern Thailand, the Red Shirts' stronghold. Five law students, wearing white T-shirts with the message "We-are-against-the-coup," flashed the

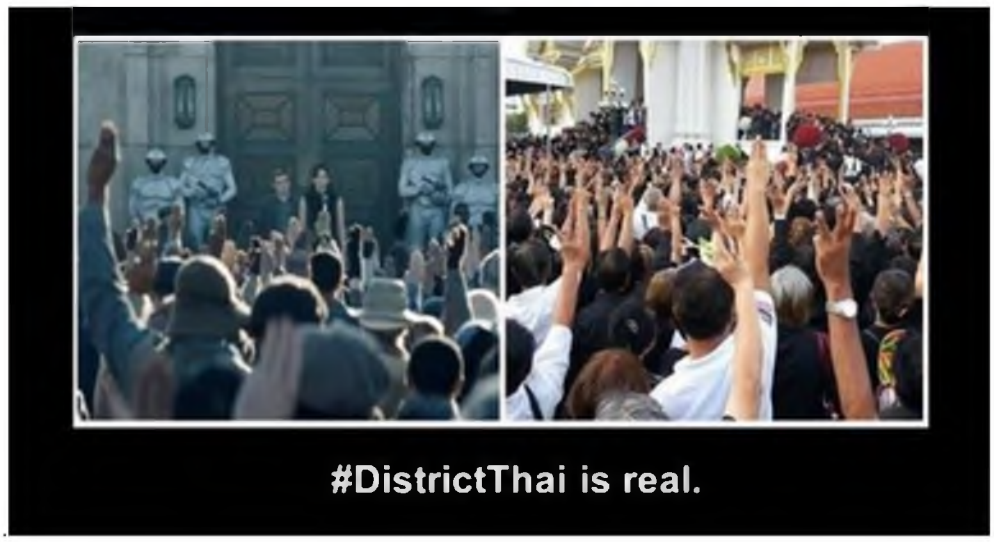

Figure 4.8 Raising the three-fingered salute was taken as defiance. Photo from #DistrictThai Facebook Page

leader their three-fingered salute at a public event (see Figure 4.9). The demonstrators were arrested on the spot and later detained at a military camp for "attitude adjustment" (Nanuam & Jikkham, 2014).

Another group of students in Bangkok organized a gathering during the movie's premiere weekend in Thailand. The group, the League of Liberal Thammasat for Democracy (LLTD), posted on their Facebook page of 80,000 followers that they would offer 160 tickets to people who participated in the discussion. Up for debate, the participants were asked to consider in what ways might the fictional Capitol be similar to the real Thai junta? Shortly after the call for participants went up online, the Scala Theater was pressured by the military to pull the movie from its original programs (The League of Liberal Thammasat for Democracy (LLTD), 2014). However, a female student showed up at another movie theater and raised the salute in front of the movie's poster (see Figure 4.10). She said, "The three-fingered sign is a sign to show that I am calling for my basic right to live my life" (Kaewjinda, 2014). Then she was promptly arrested.

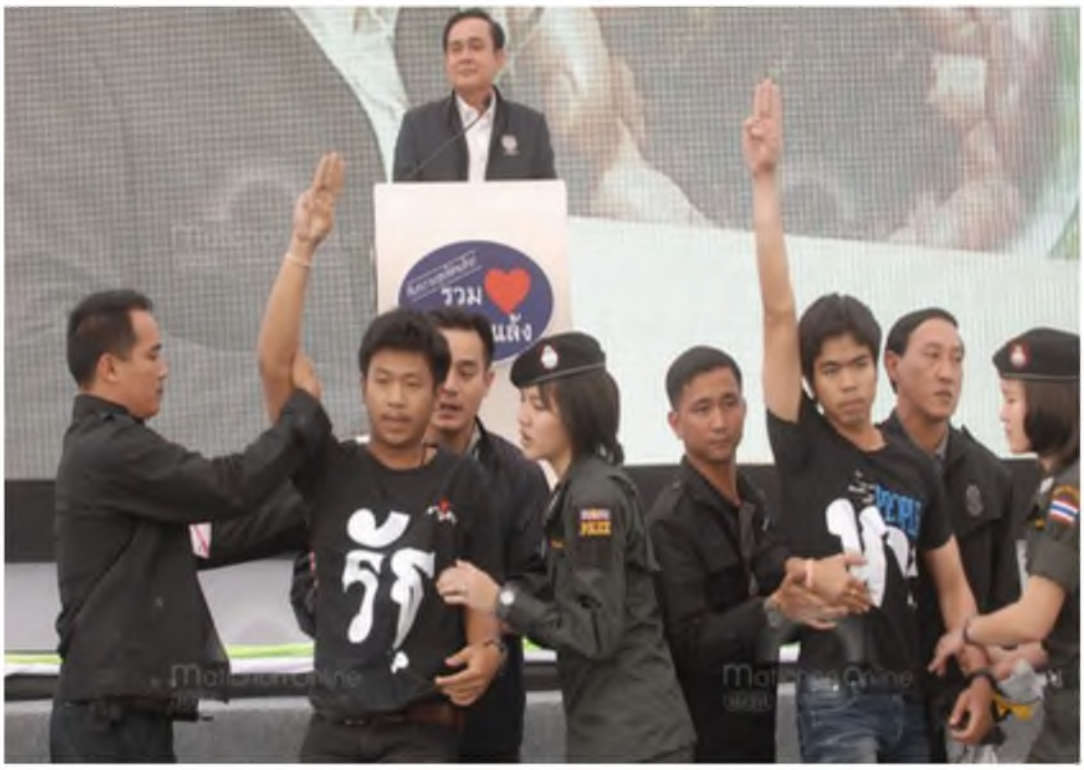

Figure 4.9 Junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha was greeted by the salute for the first time (Photo: Matichon).

When asked about the reason for the arrest, Colonel Kittikorn Boonsom of the Bangkok Metropolitan Police said, according to the news report, that the army wanted to "hold talks" with the female student, adding: "She may be taken to the army camp for *attitude adjustment*" (AFP, 2014, November 20). These arrests prompted the United Nations Human Rights Office for South-East Asia (OHCHR) to become these students' allies, publicly criticizing the junta for taking people in for questioning after making the salute. Matilda Bogner, an OHCHR representative, said, "This case is the latest illustration of a worrying pattern of human rights violations, which has the effect of suppressing critical and independent voices" (Al Jazeera and Agence France-Presse, 2014, November 21). The visuals of the three-fingered salute aggregated more faithful allies than any other

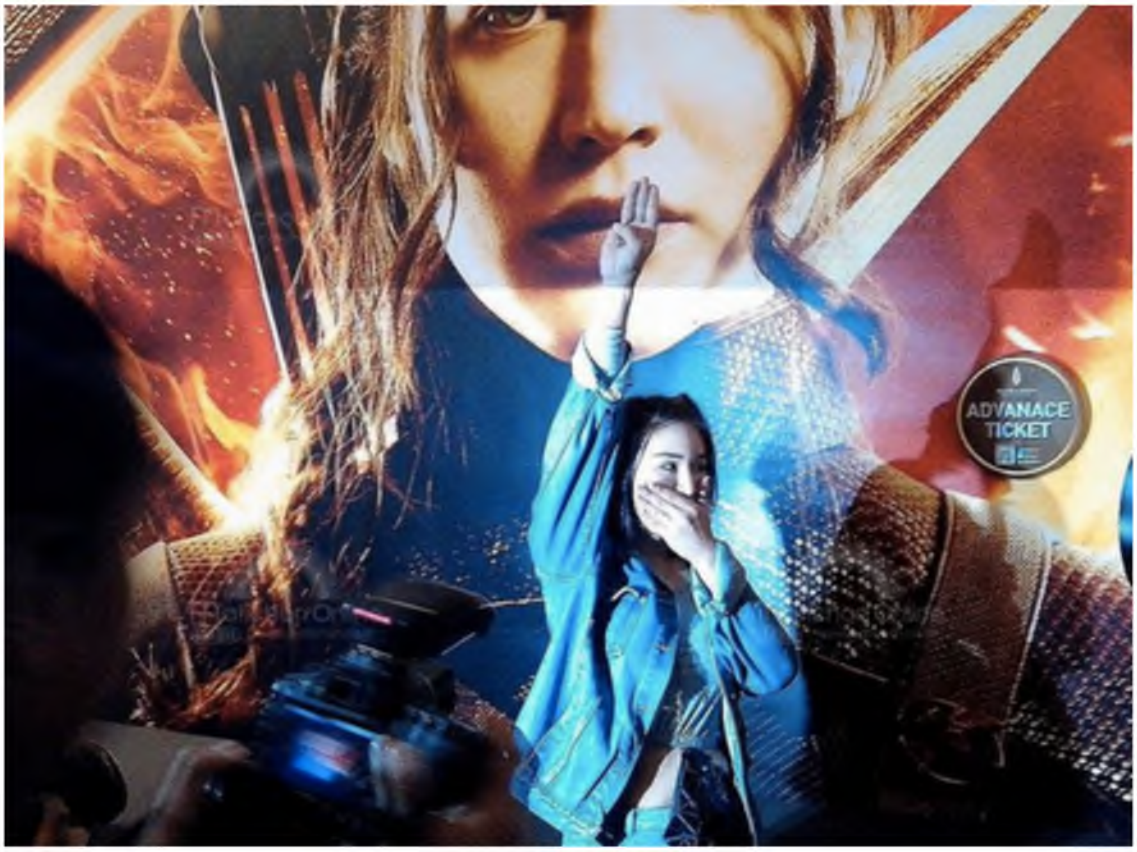

Figure 4.10 Natnicha Kongudom, a student from Bangkok University, makes the gesture from Mockingjay in front of the movie billboard at Siam Paragon theaters (Photo: Matichon).

method employed by activists during the early period of the protests, and new advocates went on staging their own selfie events for social media sharing. These images and selfie events proliferated in the online terrain. Mainstream media also featured these events, prominently capturing protesters using the gesture of resistance, and this helped forge strong allies in communication with mass audiences in other networks—the global audiences. Finally, the visuals of students getting arrested right around the time of the movie's premiere galvanized a dramatic increase in foreign press coverage. *The New York Times, CNN, The Atlantic, NPR, The Los Angeles Times, Washington Times, Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, Vice, Fox News, NBC News,*

MSNBC, Al Jazeera America, The Guardian, The Times, BBC, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Christian Science Monitor, The Salt Lake Tribune, The Hollywood Reporter, Variety, Vanity Fair, MTV, Entertainment Weekly, Yahoo News, Mashable, *Buzzfeed, Reddit, Wired, The Straits Times (Singapore), The Huffington Post (Canada),* and *Australian Broadcasting News (ABC),* among others, featured this news story. Publicity of the unruly bodies' acts and the military's reaction went beyond where anyone could have imagined. The Thai coup d'état and people's dissents had never received so much attention. Even the film's director, Francis Lawrence, began to acknowledge the resistance. He told *BuzzFeed*:

> My goal is not for kids to be out there doing things that are getting them arrested….It's just when the stakes become real, and … they're affecting people and affecting families. It gets very, very complicated. … In a sense, part of it is an honor that there [are] ideas in the movies that we're making that become so important to people that they are willing to risk something and use that symbol, and it really means something to them. But it's so scary. (Vary, 2014, para. 5)

Although Francis Lawrence might have been reluctant to support these students' acts or comment further on the topic of international politics, actor Donald Sutherland, who played the role of the antagonist President Snow, said he hoped *Mockingjay* could prompt political action. He said the film could be "a catalyst for young people who have been dormant for a generation or two, particularly in the United States" (Ee, 2014). The visuals of these bodies flashing the three-fingered salute and being arrested and taken away from the scene made visible the junta's blatant use of force. As they were introduced and circulated in social media, the images attracted and motivated new allies to defy the military's ruling. The international media allies they attracted amplified their agenda in exposing the regime's suppression that played out in a similar way as seen in the film.

The rhetorical force of this act, the proliferation of the visuals and global coverage, and a ban on the release of this movie also affected decisions about the release of the movie in China, eventually postponed to early 2015. According to *Hollywood Reporter*, *Mockingjay* had been approved, dubbed, and subtitled for release on more than 3,000 screens in China. Chinese film authorities said the delay was "to balance domestic and foreign box office totals before the year end and this would give domestic movies a clearer playing field" (Coonan, 2014). A *Washington Post* writer speculated that the ban could be attributed to the narrative in the film, explaining, "The parallels with Beijing's rule over its far-flung provinces, while perhaps not totally obvious, can be glimpsed by viewers" (Tharoor, 2014).

Extralinguistic Conversations

In social mobilization, visual communication has been designed and constructed to persuade the public toward collective action. Symbols, actions, and public performance have been employed by people to communicate rhetorical actions that motivate others (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). Cascades of the visuals of bodies in resistance, including selfies, in the anti-2014 coup manifest miscellaneous and adaptive practices to motivate others to resist the undemocratic regime. As discussed earlier, these visuals featured or concealed people's faces. These people might be stationary, showing up at the venues, defying arrest, fleeing or playing cat-and-mouse with authorities. These silent acts of protests, using symbols to communicate resistance to the junta, started the conversation with the junta and society. This section proceeds in three steps. First, it discusses what the extralinguistic aspect of these visuals said about the protesters'

practice of citizenship in regard to political rights and agencies. Second, it examines the rhetoric of these visuals as an event that disrupted the regime's narrative of peaceful political intervention, unmasking the stark truth of the junta's oppression. Third, it argues that the rhetorical force of the people's acts in visual forms mocked the junta, unraveling the latter's ridiculous responses.

Reasserting Political Rights and Agencies

The penalty for public display communicates the state's power and legitimacy in using force on its citizens. Their bodies are subject to the state's power (Foucault, 1977). Under the military ruling, Thai people's political opinions against the coup makers were handled as "crimes." The spectacles of protesters' acts against the coup also prompted visuals of them being arrested. These arrests were repeated at almost all protest sites, involving new faces of individuals, ranging from the elderly to students. The risks of being arrested were stark. I do not argue that people do not have any fear when staging acts to challenge the regime. Instead, people were aware of the situations they would be in but they took risks. They expressed their political opinions in a plethora of ways that reflected varying degrees of risk. The visuals these people generated visualized the practice of citizenship. They made visible the bodies that refused to be stripped of their political rights. They materialized the abstract concept of democracy by expressing their differing views in public. People raised their hands up in the air for others to take notice and make visible their presence. When they were arrested and dragged away from the sites, the spectacles which posed critical questions to society reminded people that their votes, political rights, and freedom of expression were being taken away. Citizens were

solely bare bodies without political agency.

The junta and the police negated the people's will to take risks in staging acts of resistance that depicted their political agencies by repeatedly telling hackneyed narratives of citizens being "hired" by political groups. After international media reported that Thai students were arrested for flashing *The Hunger Game* gesture in front of the junta leader, Assistant Army Chief Kampanat Rujdit told the press that local politicians paid these students 50,000 baht (1,700 USD). They were hired to stage the act of resistance to "compete for media's attention" during the junta leader's visit to the Northeast (Thairath Online, 2014, December 3). The comment prompted the students to set the record straight. They filed a petition to the National Human Rights of Thailand to investigate such an accusation, while urging the Army general to present evidence. They reasserted that their symbolic actions were motivated by "their conscience that failed to accept the coup and its vicious cycle" (Thairath Online, 2014, December 3). These students refused to be defined and painted by the Army, along with Thai elites who supported the coup and maintained the narrative of anti-coup protesters as greedy and gullible beings. The embodied resistance made evident to Thai society that these people risked being arrested and detained for what they believed in.

Burnett (2005) argues that images are never framed by their content. Instead, they produce extra elements, generated by people's desire about what to do with these images as they integrate them in their identities and emotions. I argue that these visuals' extralinguistic elements illuminate their shared conditions of being ruled by the oppressive regime. Such accusation and suppression generated unintentional consequences. People sympathized with these protesters who were being detained. The

visuals of these bodies being hustled by police, or individuals being swarmed by soldiers, "speak" to society, reminding us of the absence of political and human rights, as well as how rights are being savagely undermined by undemocratic means. Spectacles on the streets and those circulated online challenge our consciousness of who should wield power in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

The Oppression Is Real

The Hunger Games and its sequel *Mockingjay Part I* feature a young Katniss Everdeen who fights the affluent ruling and exploitative Capitol. While these fictional stories were written for teenagers, the theme of inequality and oppression are prevalent in the real world. Van Jones (2014) pointed out that the fictional story reflects America's inequality. He added, "These books and films are not popular because we want to escape to Katniss Everdeen's world. They are a phenomenon because we suspect her world is our own" (Jones, 2014, p.1). Thai people shared the same suspicion. They performed scenes of resistance on the streets of Thailand, generating the spectacle that converged fictional and real worlds.

Like the Capitol in *The Hunger Games*, Thai military leaders acknowledged the signifier—the three-fingered salute and its signification in the act of resistance. Although Army Deputy Spokesman Col. Winthai Suwaree said the gesture was doable, he added, "Officers usually used compromise and negotiation with the protesters, but they would enforce the law and make arrests if necessary" (The Bangkok Post Online reporters, 2014, June 2). Within 10 days after the coup, 24 protesters were arrested and charged with violating martial law, which prohibited a gathering of more than five persons.

Among those arrested were people who raised the three-fingered salute in public gatherings. Despite the junta's suppression of their gatherings on the streets, these people continued to post their selfies flashing the gesture on social media (Daily News, 2014, June 1). Junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha responded to the salute in his broadcast on national television on June 6, 2014, saying, "To raise the three-fingered salute is to imitate foreign films. I have no opposition on that. But if you want to raise the three-fingered gesture, do it inside your house. If you do it outside, it violates the announcement" (Matichon Online, 2014, June 7). Although there is no law that prohibits flashing this gesture in public, the junta leader's words were the law, banning such a gesture.

Reenacting a fictional symbol from popular culture can lead to real consequences in a despotic regime. When students were arrested in November for making this gesture at a movie theater, Gen. Prayuth Chanocha was reported in *The Guardian/Agence France-Presse* as having not been concerned with the three-fingered protests. However, he suggested that students detained for making this gesture may face "further problems." He was quoted as saying, "I don't know whether it is illegal or not but it could jeopardize their futures" (Agence France-Presse, 2014, November, 21).

The visuals of bodies making the three-fingered salute in public have forged new realities for viewers Latour explains that the juxtaposition of these fictional and real worlds was possible in an image in which fiction and nature have "a common place" (Latour, 1986, p. 8). All elements can mix in a picture and still make sense because of the "optical consistency" that facilitates rational recognition caused by the change of spaces—hybrids in seeing nature as fiction, and fiction as nature. With Thai people

displaying the salute, the fictional gesture against the dystopian society is reenacted and brought into a real setting on the streets of Bangkok. This juxtaposition unravels the film's fictional construct (the fantasy of tyranny), and injects meaningful and real context into our understanding of political oppression. The visuals that show authorities arresting characters in the movie for flashing the three-fingered salute might look ridiculous, but the images of Thai protesters flashing the same gesture and suffering a similar fate are less preposterous because they are real.

With the technology of video recording so widespread, protesters and supporters were able to capture videos the moment authorities inserted themselves into protests. *The Bangkok Post* featured a video of a woman being forced into a taxi by allegedly undercover authorities after she flashed the three-fingered salute (see Figure 4.11).

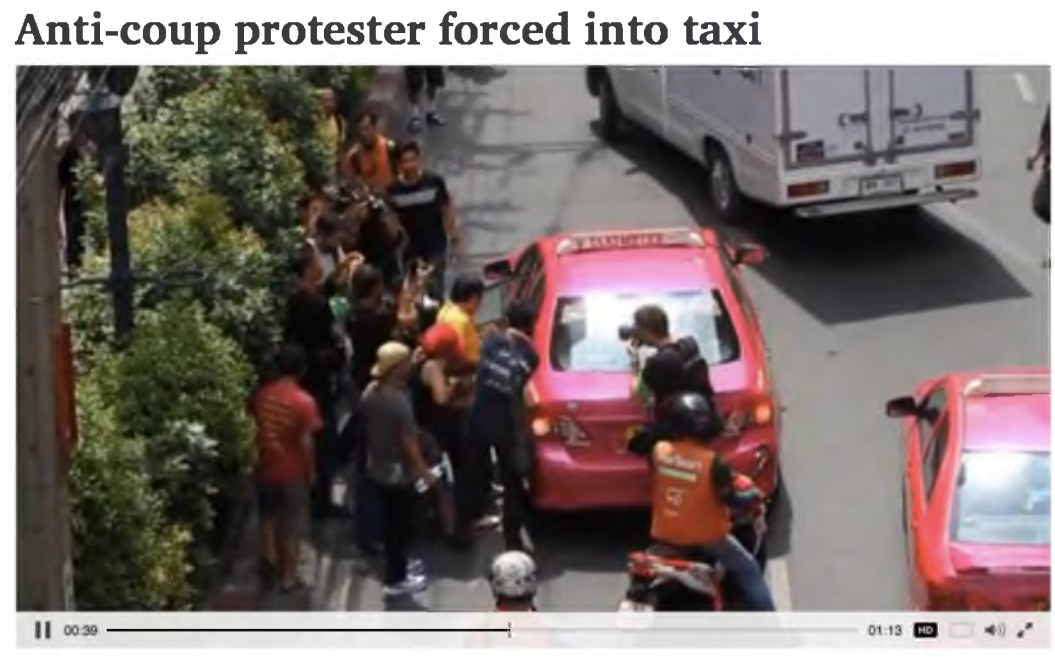

Figure 4.11 The video clip from *The Bangkok Post* showed a female protester being pushed into a taxi that quickly sped away although people tried to stop the act. Photo captured from the video on *The Bangkok Post*'s website:
http://www.bangkokpost.com/vdo/thailand/413010/anti-coup-protester-forced-into-taxi

From her ID card found in her purse at the scene, she was identified as Pairin Phuangsiri (*The Bangkok Post* , 2014, June 1). The visual of suppression forced the authorities to be in conversation with people. Pol. Col. Chaiya Kongsab admitted that the figures hustling the protester into the taxi, depicted in the video, were indeed police in plainclothes. He added that the woman was taken to Lumpini Police Station and was later transferred to the military for "further actions" (Thairath Online, 2014, June 2b).

Although Thai protesters were not shot dead on the spot (as some protesting characters are in *The Hunger Games* films), arresting them for flashing the three-fingered salutes explicitly displays the junta's despotic power over civilians. By parroting fictional gestures of defiance, the real protests in Bangkok brought to light the junta's oppressive regime, and effectively illustrated the degree to which it paralleled the Capitol in *The Hunger Games'* fictional universe. Finally, these visuals unraveled the unbridled exploitation of authoritarian power and openly contradicted the military's claim that the coup would "return happiness to the people." They interrogated society's basic belief about what it is like to be ruled by the military regime.

Mockingjay, Mocking the Junta

During previous protests in Thailand, the spectacle of contestations against authorities played out in the form of mass rallies, with a number of bodies on the streets. The presence of these bodies interrupted people's daily life to hail attention, urging people to take notice of their requests and the injustices that affected their livelihoods. This time, the visuality featured unruly bodies that "played the game with the junta." People fled the scene or sometimes intentionally refused to show up at gatherings as planned through social media. Defying the authorities was redefined by the absence of

bodies. These bodies thrived individually at various locations, rather than en masse. Now, the junta was playing the game the anti-coup protesters started. Police officers and soldiers were deployed to guard the Victory Monument and block the roads during rush-hour traffic. Shopping malls, such as Terminal 21, were closed down during the chase, and the streets were blocked to prevent protesters from gathering. Such absence exerts its force in subverting power. These chases were futile. The visuals of hundreds of police and the absence of bodies at the planned gathering were disruptive to witnesses. The spectacle of authorities guarding empty streets communicated protesters' unruliness, showing that they refused to be subject to the authorities' power to discipline them. Military suppression of the three-fingered salute intensified when *Mockingjay Part I* premiered in Bangkok. Police were patrolling movie theaters on the lookout for protesters raising *The Hunger Games* gesture. Undercover police arrested a female protester after she made this gesture at Siam Paragon Theater. Three other students were also arrested (Mydans, 2014). Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Panadda Diskul commented that flashing the gesture might prompt Hollywood to ridicule us for such imitation. He said that fictional gestures should not be used to cause dissent among people of the same nation (Thairath Online, 2014, November 23). However, it was the junta's adamant pursuit and fervent attempt at control that was ludicrous. Brad Adams, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, told *The Daily Beast*, "It's laughable. They're being a parody of themselves by arresting people for using a *Hunger Games* three-fingered salute" (Suebsaeng, 2014). A politically active student group, LLTD, also pointed this out on its Facebook page that the government has been handling this issue with excessive suppression:

> Best regards to Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha and his subordinates who idolized and gave values and meanings to the three-fingered gesture. In fact, if you were not bothered by this, no one would greet you with this gesture. The group would like to thank you for your Happiness Campaign imposed on Thai people: arresting everyone who eats sandwiches and those raising the three-fingered gesture. Your actions are now ridiculed by the world. I'm speechless. See you! (LLTD Facebook Page, 2014, November 22)

The junta's suppression became more absurd when soldiers investigated the temple that housed the sculpture of a literary monkey character, *Hanuman*, which happened to show three-fingers on its left hand (see Figure 4.12). The sculptor denied that his work was linked to anti-coup resistance, clarifying that the three fingers represented the nation, religion, and the monarchy (Thairath Online, 2014, December 22).

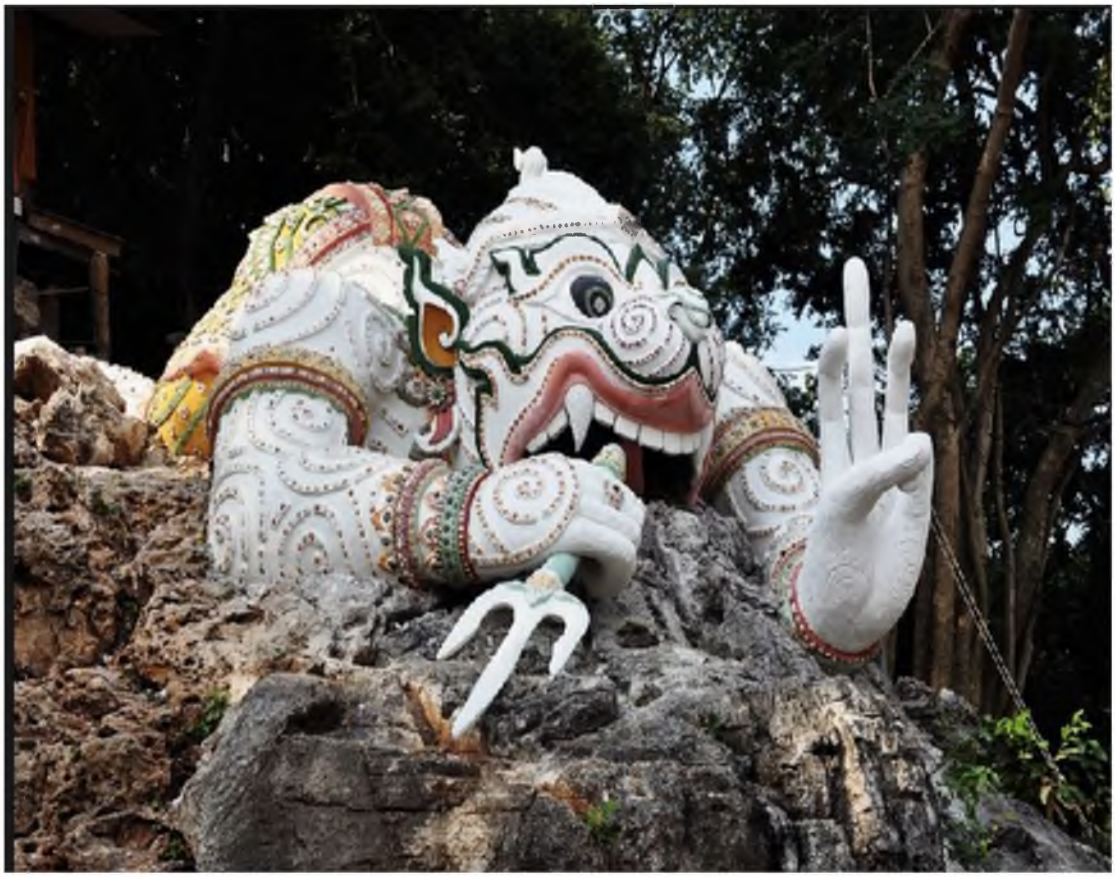

Figure 4.12 The junta's insecurity prompted an investigation of this statue of a monkey Hanuman, which displays a three-fingered gesture. (Photo: Matichon)

These incidents depicted the junta playing the oppressive regime, acting out the role of *The Hunger Games'* Capitol. The junta unveiled its unchecked exploitation of power over citizens. The arrests might have stopped some individuals from continuing to stage those acts, but the visuals of these bodies continued to "talk" in extralinguistic forms. These visuals portrayed the junta's mimicry of the Capitol in *The Hunger Games*. The junta was mocked for chasing after unarmed protesters who performed the gesture from the movie. These protesters did not even raise their voices; they simply raised their hands into the air—no words, no sound, no demand. They merely wanted to express their political views.

Conclusion

The 2014 coup d'état toppled the elected government, nullified the constitution, and gave the coup makers the absolute power to rule without the rule of law. Politicians and political advocates were either detained or monitored. Fear was prevailing in society when the junta announced on daily broadcasts the names of people who were required to report to the military. Police showed up at universities to ban seminars and talks. They visited political activists at their houses at night and took them to military camps. As an institution fond of discipline, the military relentlessly put "things in order," ranging from taking up power to administer the country to adamantly suppressing unruly citizens. Protesters on the streets were arrested. Since the coup began in May, the junta invited people who were politically active for "conversations," and arrested protesters to have their "attitudes adjusted." Expressing political views online or on the streets involved risks of being arrested. Such conditions prompted people to generate extralinguistic

conversations with the junta. With unruly bodies, they initiated selfie events to express disagreement with the coup—the rupture to the army's hackneyed narrative of "peaceful intervention" to diffuse political tension. These conversations did not fall under the terrain of speech acts, or ideal Habermasian debates. Rather, they were the visuals of bodies, depicting creative acts of resistance against despotic rulers, organized on social media without orators or speeches. The visuals flourished and operated in rhizomatic ways, continuing to advance and thrive even when their creators were stopped or arrested. When suppressed, protesters were adaptive to the risky environment and decided not to show up. This generated the spectacle of a protest site without protesters and authorities guarding an empty space. Appropriation of symbols from popular culture such as the three-fingered salute from *The Hunger Games* created greater alliances of bodies. The appropriation, like pollens, made their acts visible and ready to be picked up by other actants. These visuals attracted global media attention while expanding alliances of prodemocracy groups. These visuals of bodies reasserted the protesters' political rights and agencies, while highlighting the oppression by the regime and materializing the abstract idea of oppression. The photos of protesters and students being arrested and taken away reflected the severe restrictions on political expression. In addition, these events depicted the junta's voluntary mimicry of the Capitol—the tyrannical regime in the fictional world of *The Hunger Games*.

These visuals of the protesters revealed the practice of citizenship during the time when the elected government was toppled. They created their own space to express democratic participation, voicing their political views in public. Resistance in the form of cultural practices disseminated through social media networks might be viewed with

skepticism regarding its impact and effects on restoring democracy and elections. These acts of resistance might not bring immediate change; however, social actions and social change often start from change in people's consciousness. It is a process that takes time. The visual cascade of events disrupts what people used to see in the coups. These undemocratic political interventions entailed not peace in society, but the sheer suppression of dissident views and the violation of political rights. These visuals of police in plainclothes taking protesters into a taxi or whisking away unruly bodies in front of the public exerted force in disrupting people's assumption about the coup. Through these visuals, people witnessed coercion and overtly severe suppression of political expression. Authorities taking bodies by force, dragging them from the site, produced visuals that shocked viewers. However, the shock and fear were not unrewarding, for it takes moments of shock to prompt people to think (Deleuze, 1994).

These rhizomatic acts of resistance created "a map and not a tracing" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). The map is oriented toward an experiment in contact with the real—the junta. This map provides multiple points to enter and perform, "connectible in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). The cartography of anti-coup activism has been redrawn. These events exposed people to the kind of society they live in. As Foucault (1978) posits, it is positive that these points of resistance and their codifications opened avenues for revolutions. Through people's personal social media networks, the points of resistance started and blossomed, crisscrossing online and offline

terrains, aggregating new faithful allies, illuminating the abstract idea of oppression, and fomenting change.

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CHAPTER 5

REIMAGINING VISUALS OF RESISTANCE:

TRACING AND BECOMING

"We may be fragile, but so are the powerful."
Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, p. 14

"There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it's within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another… There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons."
Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," p. 4

As this chapter was written, Thailand was still ruled by the military junta. The new constitution has been drafted and will be put to a referendum in July 2016. The junta leader said a general election would be held in 2017, whether voters would accept this draft or not (Nanuam, 2016). Since the 2014 coup d'état, the country has been under sheer suppression with countless cases of people being taken from their houses to the military camps for "attitude adjustment." Such a condition has forged more forms of political expressions, introduced and shared on their communication platforms such as social media, chat groups, and smartphones. Everyone is a creator and media, working as a solo artist or in alliance with others, proliferating ideas or visuals of resistance. In the latest surge of suppression, on March 29, 2016, a woman was arrested for posting a selfie with a water bowl, a freebie distributed from the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. She was charged with breaching the internal security law. The military

argued that Thaksin has been convicted of corruption charges (The Bangkok Post, 2016). When the military thinks it can keep people from expressing their thoughts and political views by detaining them at military camps, decentered individuals will still express their opinions in other forms. When posting a selfie led to being arrested, people went back to proliferating memes. The next day, several versions of memes exploded the Internet, juxtaposing the junta leader with the new object of sedition—the red water bowl. It is hard to know who originally created these memes that cropped up and exerted their force in critiquing and making fun of these "rulers." These memes burgeon in the networked communication that has no beginning, ending, or center. They are rhizomes that are unruly and chaotic, escaping the arborescent structure and fleeing the military—the institution that is fond of disciplines, hierarchical order and subjecting people to power. Still, the Thai people's fight continues. Their resistance transforms, reterritorializes and deterritorializes, escaping and refusing to be striated. It is a becoming. We are becoming in the assemblages. The tracings continue.

As Deleuze argues, writing is a tracing. The writing in this dissertation is also a tracing, following the lines, the shattered, the entanglements, the connections and alliances of Thai people's resistance. It makes visible the network with actors and actants doing things—the tracing—that exert force. Latour and Hermant (2009) argue in *Paris: Invisible City*, which is a "social opera" to walk through the city, "in texts and images, exploring some of the reasons why it cannot be captured at a glance" (Latour & Hermant, 2009, p. 1). They argue that by glancing from above the city, it is easy to overlook other things. It is not possible to understand the whole city by a "glance" or by looking at a few images of Paris. Latour and Hermant pick up on what others might ignore. They start to

explore the city by examining mundane things, such as the roads or waterways or police that sustain life in Paris. These scholars posit a refreshing approach in looking at these labyrinths of elements linked in a network, offering the alternate view in social theory—the actor network theory. The close reading is not to scrutinize the objects that are viewed as fragments, existing in isolation. Rather, these fragments, objects, actors or actants that might seem disconnected are in fact connected in the ways that are invisible to our eyes and to humanist scholars. This view provides ontological grounds for examining media technology and political resistance in our time.

In this chapter, I return to the concepts of media technology and posthumanist ontology in examining the visuals of the resistance, making tracings in the network. Also, I revisit my case studies to illustrate assemblages and rhizomatic visuals of resistance in the networked communication. The chapter ends with a contribution to the field of visual communication and social movements in the digital age, and challenges for activism in the wake of mass surveillance and big data.

Media Technology in the Posthumanist Time

Technology transforms our social relations and social organizations. McLuhan (1964/2001) argues that technology alters our way of being and transforms social changes. He illustrates this with the example that technology of print allows for mobility. It subsequently promotes linear thinking and organizes our way of seeing or the visual culture. Print also homogenized the French as a nation and the typographic principle led to uniformity, continuity and linearity. The emerging group of people, such as "the new literati and lawyers," transformed by this technology, eventually challenged the feudal

system in the revolution (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 16). Like typography, invention of money that penetrated Japan's economy in the 17th century through global trade led to the fall of the feudal power that kept the country secluded for two centuries. Technology such as trains or electricity transforms and enhances our intensity of engagement. McLuhan argues, "the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception continuously and effortlessly" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 17). This explains the visual medium such as television's possibility to privilege the images over written texts. The visuals of people on this medium became more prominent. In presidential elections, a candidate who performs well on television gains an upper hand. This was obvious in the case of former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan, who was projecting warm a personality with nurturing tones on television.[1]

Scholars such as McLuhan, Ong, Innis, Carey and Carr believe that technology affects us. It transforms our consciousness (Ong, 2002). It also rewires our brains (Carr, 2011). Technology's impact is not centered on the dichotomy of the good or bad on the contents we see every time we have new technology. McLuhan's concept of "Medium is the Message" illustrates this point. He explains, "the content of any medium is always another medium" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 8). Speech is the content of writing, while the written word is the content of print. The electronic light does not have any message unless it is used to provide lighting that makes other activities possible. In this way, the medium is the message that "shapes, and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 9). The message of the medium such as

[1] This example was mentioned by Dr. Kevin DeLuca during his class at the University of Utah, COMM 7000 Media, Activism and China, on September 9, 2013.

the movie is its ability to shift linear sequences to "configurations" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 12). We have departed from the tyrannical order of print, straight lines, roads, structures of feelings or hierarchy and we have adopted the characteristics of "nomads" (Lapham, 1964/2001, p. xxii). People are decentered; however, they can be mobilized and easily connected with the infrastructure such as the Internet and social media platforms that do not have contents but allow for new kinds of arrangements and associations. Benkler (2006) argues that the networked information environment brought structural change, creating new opportunities to collaborate and coordinate action in a nonmarket sector. The decentralized patterns allow people to pursue their will and realize what they wish to do at a lower cost and with less bureaucracy. These activities might be political organizations or recreation groups. We now see an explosion of "groups," "communities," "fan pages"— networks. Facebook always encourages users to expand their networks by suggesting friends to add and interact. Content in social media does not matter as much as connection (Taylor, 2014). Our engagement in this medium has changed into "perpetual participation" (DeLuca et al., 2012).

Technology affects us and we also affect other things. Deleuze and Latour provocatively argue that the world is not the binary, but multiplicities, assemblages, and networks—comprising actors and actants exerting a varying intensity of force. Isolating humans from technology or privileging technology over humans or online over offline existence will simply reduce possibilities of these actors. Posthumanist ontological views of Latour and Deleuze and Guattari broaden examinations of relations of humans and nonhumans or objects linked together in the network, rather than the reductionist view of the dichotomy, logocentric discourse, or mode of production. The study of media

technology, such as social media and activism should extend beyond whether the social media platforms are echo chambers or whether the revolution will take off. For Latour, the world is nothing but networks with actors and actants. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer the similar concept of assemblages that included all things, human and nonhuman—rhizomes–the practice that can create lines of flight. Multiplicities and creation are what we can emphasize.

Computer networks might not perfectly fit Latour's definition of the network as the former are stabilized and final. Similarly, computer networks do not precisely match Deleuze's explanation of rhizomes because the computers are built on codes—the binary codes with pre-established channels of transmission. "This is evident in current problems in information science and computer science, which still cling to the oldest modes of thought in that they grant all power to a memory or central organ" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 16). Social media platforms such as Facebook are also controlled by the hierarchical structures of algorithms. However, these technologies provide the networked infrastructure that facilitates the mobility of things to proliferate rhizomatically.
The proliferation of ideas, visuals such as banners, memes, selfies propagated at great speed and transgress the territory of social media, exceeding beyond the control of the binary codes of tree-like structures.

With this approach, this dissertation takes into account the assemblages of communication technology, smart phones, data plans, social media platforms, people, performances, images, cultural practices, memes, movies and oppression by the institutions of power. These actants were exerting different forces in relations to and against the others. Social movements comprise these material and immaterial things.

These things generate "a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to" (Latour, 2005, p. 5). Latour, Deleuze, and Guattari's prescient insights have never been more relevant in the wake of global protests, amplified by people's adoption of social media communication.

Tracing the Visuals of Rhizomatic Resistance in the Network

The case studies of activism in Thailand reconfigures the cartography of resistance and practice of citizenship in the age of networked communication and hyper ocular time. People cannot stop sharing the visuals of their daily life, selfies, cats, or atrocities they witness. Under the conditions of the changing ecology of technology, media's self-censorship, martial law and miltiary regime's fervent suppresion, Thai people's political expressions transformed from the linear, sequential or hierarchical organization of mass protests into decentered groups with fragmented gatherings, loosely organized by means of social platforms or small group communication. They created their acts of resistance from the middle point since protest leaders were arrested or detained and grassroots protesters were killed in the 2010 crackdown. Deleuze and Guattari call this "the intermezzo"—the rhizome—which people can enter from any point. They materialized resistance by generating the visuals of their acts of defiance. In these visuals, we see the assemblages of multiple types of actors both material and antimaterial: the bodies to generate the visuals, the event to assemble, the smart phones to capture the visuals, the popular culture to attract global attention and the networked

communication to disseminate their visuals and connect with other alliances including the mass media. These actors and actants do things, creating new elements and transforming into other visuals after being suppressed.

Thai people innovated alternative ways to participate in politics by performing in public, creating and sharing memes, and posting selfies enacting a symbol from popular culture. The first case study examines the street performances, the Red Shirts' "new media" to express their political views and rearticulate the truths about the massacre. The second case discusses the profusion of memes on social media hightened during the surge of political turmoil in 2013. In the last case study, we saw the new configurations of all of these actants in their expression of resistance againt the 2014 coup d'etat when people went out to perform *The Hunger Games'* three-finger salute, took selfies, made them into memes, shared and posted these on social media that amplified the issue and attracted global attention. These cases illustrated the force in the following orientations: truth disruption participation, and amplification. All these orientations are visible in all three cases; however, each chapter highlighted each orientation more extensively.

Truth Disruption

Chapter 2 addresses the question of how people assembled and included elements in their assemblages to disrupt the official narrative. The Red Shirt protesters contested the government's official narratives that framed them as perpetrators, terrorists and arsonists. Their new form of resistance—performances—generated new truths, new ways of knowing, making visible the bodies that the government killed in the crackdown and erased from the official archive of the incidents. Their resistance played out in the form

of practices of everyday life. Appearing in public, people countered the government's narrative frames of terrorists and arsonists by wearing the Red Shirts when going shopping, doing aerobic dance, picnicking or biking. The reenactments of the deaths at the crime scenes were also the events to assemble other alliances and other truths. Performing death on the street was the essential disruption to the justification that the Red Shirts deserved to be killed. They acted as the ghosts that came back from the past to demand for justice. Their shouts hailed attention to accountability to society, in which the people who orchestrated the killing are still at large. The performances of vigils and Buddhist merit-makings at the temple where six people were killed connected victims and their relatives who publicly shared their truths on the day of the crackdown. Altogether, performances were assemblages that appeared, moved, acted, reframed and disrupted the visuals and truths imposed upon them.

Participation

McLuhan argues that the message of the medium such as railroads is the change in pace and scale that railroads permeates people's activities regardless of what the railroads transport. Simiarly, the Internet alters pace, scale and participation of people's affairs. They constantly participate in the social network culture of "sharing" things with people in their network. Participation is easily achieved with a smart phone connected to the Internet. The ease in participation transfers to politics. Political particiation is no longer limited to rational and idealized forms of speech. People post and share memes. Chapter 3 discusses the proliferation of rhizomatic memes. They might sound trivial; however, memes are Latourian actants, generating rhetorical force in directing people's

attention to what they depict. Memes are things, asking us to engage (Johnson, 2007). Similar to photographs, memes invite looking. They can be produced in response to current events or issues relevant to their lives. People adopted and shared memes to mobilize for political acts, co-create and interpret meaning of events, contest truths or participate in cultural production for entertainment when political tension heightened.

Amplification

The last chapter discusses the network, the assemblages, and rhizomatic acts that proliferated at speed, aggregating new alliances. The military suppression catalyzesd creative forms of resistance initiated by decentered individuals. We see the reconfigurations of real and fictive worlds. The performances on the streets, captured as selfies, proliferate social media feeds. A new actant was included in the assemblage of defiance—the three-finger salute from the Holloywood blockbuster *The Hunger Games*, which has global alliances. The visuals of people going on their own, staging the acts for selfies and risking being arrested, territorialized social media. These visuals of resistance more adaptive as people were aware of those risks. When some were arrested by the junta, the new visuals of their arrests confirmed the oppression in Thailand, the kind that is similar to the fictional District 11 in *The Hunger Games*. While their acts were stopped, the visuals of their acts did not cease to flourish. They were amplified, making headlines and being featured on international news including entertainment publications such as *Variety* or *Entertainment Weekly*. The Thai coup d'état and anti-coup activism have never had this much global coverage. These visuals generated the extralinguistic conversations with the junta and other people in Thailand and global alliances for

democracy, elucidating the oppression of the military junta.

Reimagining the Visuals of Resistance: Creating and Becoming

Scholarship on activism on the Internet discusses people's adoption of technology in social protests. There was a surge in hope and excitement when the Internet emerged as a key ground for activism and social movements with the protests in Iran and then the Arab Spring, starting in Tunisia and culminating in the fall of the Egyptian government in early 2012. The Indignadas protests in Spain, mobilized on social media, turned into the gatherings of thousands of people. These were the inspirations for the 2011 Occupy Wall Street (OWS) (Castells, 2012). OWS was the first protest in the United States that involved social media and traveled to other parts of the US and around the world (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). The subsequent surges of protests included the 2014 Ferguson, sparking a series of protests on police brutality across the country with the hashtags: #MikeBrown, #EricGarner, #HandsUpDontShoot, #Icantbreathe or #CrimingWhileWhite, among others.

Social media were instrumental for moving protests onto public screens (DeLuca, Sun, & Peeples, 2011). Communication technologies are essential as they connect cyberspace with urban space to form "hybrid networked movements" (Castells, 2012, p. 177). These "create new contexts for activism that do not exist in the world of traditional mass media organizations. With social media, the grounds of possibility for activism have been multiplied and transformed" (DeLuca et al., 2012, p. 500). This dissertation illustrates these possibilities.

Adding to the scholarship in social movements, I argue that Thai individuals generate rhizomatic visuals of resistance. Rather than relying on mass bodies on the

streets to generate image events and to attract the media attention, a few individuals can generate their own events, bypass mainstream media and immediately disseminate the visuals of these events via their smart phones to others on their social media network. Illustrating Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes, Thai protesters generated other acts of resistance in creative forms to avoid being arrested by the authorities. The acts of resistance mutated from performances, memes, and heightened with the multitude of varieties of self-initiated anti-coup acts—Do-It-Yourself activism. We saw that people start a game of cat-and-mouse with the military by appearing or deciding not to appear on the streets, changing the venues of the gatherings or simply posting the visuals of themselves or selfies on social media. These are *selfie events* that carry political expressions, advocating for or against the oppressive regime thriving in social media platforms and ceaselessly transform when suppressed. These visuals are not uniform, but rhizomatic.

Second, the visuals and the events of the Thai protesters were assemblages of gatherings that connected people and displaced street protests and speeches. These are new ways to connect—new kinds of networks to include possibilities of humans and nonhumans. These gatherings were the points for them to assemble different elements to forge defiance and connect with more ties. These can be their presences, performances, their stories of truths, props, objects to simulate blood and guts, effigies, shouts, memes, quotes, words, popular culture, everyday life practices, hashtags, symbols and selfies, among others. Altogether, these actors and actants communicate the messages of contestation to society. The hybrid forms of networks may not be coherent. In "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik: Or How to Make Things Public," Latour (2005) argues,

> It's clear that each object—each issue—generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. (p. 5)

In this network, new alliances brought their objects to express their opinions during the height of political crises. These opinions do not cohere with the models of rational debates in the Habermasian public sphere, in which people bracket their biases or passions, and speak with pure rationality that could lead to the public good. But, the scholarship in the public sphere rests on the idealized assumption that people are oriented to culture in the same way when they are not. People in oral cultures have different concerns from those in the print cultures. Electronic media, as McLuhan argues, shift the order of print and rational debates (McLuhan, 1964/2001). To cope with incoherence and fragments of visuals we see today, DeLuca, Sun and Peeples (2011) posit the transformation of the public sphere into the public screens as a practical tactic for activism. They argue, "public screens highlight dissemination, images, hypermediacy, spectacular publicity, cacophony, immersion, distraction, and dissent" (DeLuca et al. 2011, p. 144). These assemblages with the virtual, the online and offline, fictional or real, are not mutually exclusive. Fiction and reality can be juxtaposed to create new pictures and new realities. The fictional acts of oppression from *The Hunger Games* became real on the streets of Bangkok when Thai authorities arrested individuals for flashing these gestures at a shopping mall in Thailand. These visuals unmask the invisible abstract idea of oppression that many might have doubted. Thai people are living in *The Hunger Games'* dystopian society today.

Third, altogether, these rhizomatic visuals and assemblages are the practice of citizenship. Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2011) expressed skepticism on the self-organized activism on social media, calling it slacktivism or clicktivism that required a more well-organized pattern to accomplish an end goal. Internet research debates on whether the Internet is an echo chamber or not (Garrett, 2009; Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2012; Sunstein, 2001). This dissertation does not focus on such dichotomies. I refrain from a cyberutopian or technology-deterministic position or the claim that social media activism is a panacea for democracy. Rather, I argue that social media communication technology creates a space with possibilities. We can brainstorm, communicate or practice democracy. As Rancière (2014) argues in *Hatred for Democracy*, people have to create and organize their own space. To practice democracy and citizenship means to make room for dissensus. The visuals of defiance introduce new truths to the world, questioning the normalized justification in the mass protest crackdown and the military coup. Their contestations generate relational forces that travel along the lines of weak ties, affecting others to act beyond the algorithms of Facebook and go out to stage their own acts of resistance on the streets. These acts materialize opposition and destabilize the institutions of power. These visuals and assemblages might start from one or a few individuals, but the immediate multiplications of these visuals on social media feeds can pressure those in power to be in conversations with issues these people contested. These are new types of conversations generated by visuals of critiques that individuals have introduced.

This dissertation discusses people's attempts to fight an oppressive regime by reimagining the visuals that exert force via communication technology. Drawing from

Latour's actor network theory, objects, things and people should be viewed as part of the assemblages. These visuals of resistance might seem fragmented but are related in depicting people's political opinions against normalized practices of military oppression.

Challenges in Networked Communication

Networked communications cannot be thought of as a space that ideally promotes freedom of expression. We leave digital footprints on every website we have visited. Cookies collect our data and the activities we participate in online. Shirky argues that the Internet allows for organization and mobilization at lower costs, making it "ridiculously easy" for people to participate in events introduced on networked communication (Shirky, 2008, p. 54). This also makes it easy for governments to monitor people's online activities. The wake of the mass surveillance program by the US National Security Agency (NSA) proved this point. The UK government also attempted to pass the mass surveillance law to monitor its citizens' online activities (Burgess, 2016). Deleuze (1992) mentioned Guattari's prediction that a society with a computer can track everyone's position by means of an electronic card one carries. This has come true, but with our cell phones that send out information about our locations at different times. People's acts of resistance can be monitored without their knowledge. Foucauldian mass surveillance can produce individuals who resort to self-censorship and those who mediate their behaviors. In addition, companies such as Google, Verizon, and Facebook admitted that in the past they have complied with the NSA's requests for users' information (Ackerman & Rushe, 2014).

Corporations' algorithm impacts what people see on their social media feeds.

Tech companies have collected big data to predict consumer behaviors to maximize profits. Google's algorithm on YouTube suggests video clips based on what users watch to keep them on their sites for advertising opportunities. Facebook's infamous research that received the most attention in 2014 wanted to figure out how to maximize users' time on its site by probing its users' emotional state (Hern, 2014). This research revealed that emotions were contagious. People who were exposed to positive feeds reacted by writing positive posts while those exposed to negative content tended to responded with negative posts on their status updates (Goel, 2014). Negative contents were red flags as they could drive people away from its site. *The Washington Post* illustrated Facebook's algorithmic filter that opted out of controversial topics such as Ferguson (Sullivan, 2014). One Twitter user commented, "#Ferguson is dominating my Twitter feed, and is nonexistent on Facebook" (McComas, 2014). Similarly, Sociologist Zeynep Tufekci said that she could see tweets about Ferguson in real time but her Facebook feeds did not show posts about Ferguson until the next morning. She also raised concerns on the "algorithm censorship" that can affect issues such as Ferguson's visibility on people's walls.

In addition, one of the administrators of a political fan page in Thailand argued that his page views dropped after Facebook started its option to advertise the page's posts[2] (name witheld, 2014). The page views reached fewer people at the time of the April-June, 2014, the month before and after the 2014 coup. This could be explained by the algorithm that filtered controversial contents and Facebook's marketing plans to encourage page adminsitrators to pay for more views and audiences. Meanwhile, Twitter

[2] From a personal interview with one of the Facebook fan page administrators who was released after being detained at a military camp in the wake of the 2014 coup.

claimed they did not have an algorithm to filter the tweets on people's feeds until February 2016, when it announced new algorithms that would affect users' timelines. When logging onto Twitter, users will see contents that matter to them instead of a chronological order of tweets. However, Twitter users can opt out algorithmic feed under account settings (Pierce, 2016).

Other challenges from the structure and ecology of Facebook come in the form of peer-monitoring. Facebook users can report the page, community or comments that they do not like and would like Facebook to take down. After the 2014 coup d'etat, the government targeted popular Facebook fan pages and communities that generated and disseminated memes criticizing the coup makers. This could be the work of the military's Information Operataion (IO). "They have a list of Facebook pages to report," a Facebook page administrator said. He/she added that page administrators had to start new versions of the page, marked by V.2 for Version 2, for example. They started to add people and then posted from both versions of the page. When the first version of the page was eventually taken down by Facebook due to the opposition's requests, the other version was ready to continue posting political memes. There were also other pages that were reported and banned. However, these administrators could immediately start new ones, adding people back to their pages. When all versions were reported, the other pages that might share the same group of audiences helped promote the newer versions that were instantly reincarnated. They could fight peer monitoring and the junta's IO; however, they would lose some audiences and followers and have to start from square one.

Activism involves real risks and challenges from communication technology. Within the existing conditions, the visuals of people's resistance are not roaming and

moving freely. These actors and actants also exert force, aggregating or filtering out what we see on our social media feeds. More visuals of resistance are still introduced, particularly, the form of memes, made by unknown individuals or Facebook pages. These visuals continue to critique the junta and its policy almost daily as oppression continues to unfold. Rancière argues that freedoms gained were not gifts of oligarchs. Freedoms have to be fought through democratic action. "The 'rights of man and of the citizen' are the rights of those who make them reality" (Rancière, 2014, p. 74). Should we lose hope? Or should we be hopeful as Castells suggests in *Network of Outrage and Hope*? Deleuze offers another suggestion, "There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4). The rhizomes of resistance continue to transform and incessantly thrive, opening possibilities for new becomings.

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